



LOCAL RADIO IN AFGHANISTAN

A SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

Prepared by Altai Consulting for Internews | Afghanistan – January 2017



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Altai Consulting has been leading research into media in Afghanistan since 2004. Some of Altai's key publications related to Afghan media include *Afghan Media – Three Years After: Media and Alternative Sources of Information in Afghan Society* (2005), *Afghan Media in 2010* (2010), and *Afghan Media in 2014: Understanding the Audience* (2014).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The role of local radio has seen significant change through the past 15 years as dynamics in the wider media landscape have shifted, and new forms of media have been introduced and become increasingly widespread while other forms have withered. Several developments in the media sector highlight concerns about the sustainability of local radio stations. These developments include decreasing international support to media, television diverting radio audiences wherever it is accessible, and audiences increasingly focusing on national rather than local media outlets. As a result, some stations have had to cease their activities while others operate below profitability.

Yet rural Afghanistan has historically had limited access to information through media, and radio remains a primary information source for many households in rural areas where 75% of the population relies on radio broadcasts in order to meet information needs.¹ Low literacy rates, insecurity, and poor infrastructure restrict access to print media, while a lack of electricity, limited broadcast areas, and the cost of equipment and subscription services keep television ownership and usage relatively low.

Accordingly, the historical resilience of radio and its future prospects within Afghanistan's fluid media landscape, and in particular the viability of local radio stations' efforts to guarantee a minimum level of access to information for even the most remote communities, warrants in-depth analysis.

INTERNEWS AND SALAM WATANDAR

In the years from 2003 to 2011, Internews established 36 local radio stations across 29 provinces in Afghanistan in order to address the lack of independent and localized information production and distribution, especially in rural areas.

Establishment of the first of these radio stations occurred at a time when media was generally looked upon with suspicion, and the concept of community-based radio foreign to Afghanistan. While the stations initially operated within what was otherwise a media vacuum, they set a precedent and contributed significantly to the subsequent flourishing of the media sector in the country.

In order to ensure minimum standards in the quantity and quality of content broadcast by these radio stations, in 2005 Internews set up Salam Watandar, a Kabul-based production company that produces programs that cover national and international news, issues such as health, education, and rule of law as well as soap operas. Since 2007, these programs have been transmitted by satellite to the network of stations and broadcast locally between the peak hours of 7-9am and 6-8pm.²

In 2012, Salam Watandar became an independent organization. It has since expanded its network from the initial 36 Internews-established stations to include privately-established stations that recognized the appeal of its content and support services. Today, the Salam Watandar network consists of 74 full and limited partner stations.³

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

This study assesses the role and impact of this local radio station network as well as its sustainability prospects, focusing on four pillars of sustainability in particular:

¹ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by the Asia Foundation, 2016.

² Up to 2016, broadcast times were 7-8:30am and 6-7:30pm, subsequently changed to 7-9am and 6-8pm.

³ *Vulnerable Radio Stations & Their Sustainability: An Assessment of 10 Vulnerable Radio Stations*, report prepared by Salam Afghanistan Media Organization (Najib Yourish and Zamir Mirzada), 2016: 3 - Note that network affiliation is constantly changing with new stations entering the network whilst others exit.

- *Financial sustainability*: at a minimum, radio stations need to be able to support their activities, and ideally enjoy some surplus for innovation.
- *Organizational sustainability*: radio stations need to have access to a level of professionalism and resources that allow it to produce and present programs of reasonable quality.
- *Political and cultural sustainability*: radio stations need to be politically enabled to perform their activities, to do so in safety, and to enjoy the support of the communities within their broadcast area.
- *Audience sustainability*: radio stations need to be able to reach a sizeable audience, and to meet this audience's information needs and expectations.

To this end, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the Internews/Salam Watandar story as well as those involved in media operations at the central Kabul level were combined with 10 in-depth case studies from the research sample of 30 provincial Internews-established, full Salam Watandar-partner stations. 20 in-depth interviews by phone with the remaining sample stations were added to this.

Each case study consisted of key informant interviews with station management and staff, community elders, and advertisers as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with listeners of the radio station and non-listeners, and a brief audience survey. A total of 62 key informant interview and 32 focus group discussions were conducted, and 808 audience members were surveyed in the ten selected communities across Afghanistan.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: Local Radio's Scope

In rural Afghanistan, the types and quantity of media accessible, especially in semi-rural areas such as provincial and district centers, is growing. Note that growth, however, is patchy with many areas remaining under-served. Despite a higher rate of media penetration, specifically of television and to a minor extent internet, radio remains the medium of choice for accessing information in rural environments: FM radio devices are cheap, receivers are built into most mobile phones, the sound quality of local radio is often better than that of national radio on AM/shortwave, and the language of broadcasts is easy to understand.

Radio usage in rural environments has diversified both in terms of the segments within society that listen to radio, including young and old, men and women, the manner in which it is listened to – that is, privately and/or communally - as well as the times it is listened to with mornings or evenings being popular in different locales. Local radio both drives and responds to this trend, tailoring its programming to cater to the various groups within communities – men, women, the elderly, and youth – and broadcasting up to 24 hours a day in the case of some stations.

As the most accessible medium as well as one that appeals to different groups within society, local radio can reach a true cross-section of rural Afghanistan's population.

Finding 2: The Role and Impact of Local Radio

Local radio's predominant roles are that of information provider, entertainer, educator, and watchdog. Stations provide communities within their broadcast areas with international, national, and local news as well as information on practical, community-related matters. Content is sourced widely with the internet becoming an increasingly important and widely-used resource. As an educator, stations provide interactive program formats that offer listeners engaging learning experiences on topics directly affecting the community and ranging from how to best deal with tourists in Panjshir, for example, to the rights of women according to Islam. As a watchdog, local radio bridges the gap between the community and the authorities by raising the voice of the former and demanding accountability from the latter.

The impact of local radio runs parallel to its roles as information provider, educator, and watchdog. Local radio stands out for its ability to pinpoint specific needs within the communities it serves in respect to information and education gaps as well as public grievances, and to address these accordingly. Local radio's impact, therefore, is tailored and effective but remains highly localized.

Finding 3: Financial Sustainability

Local radio stations' financial sustainability is uncertain within an environment of declining donor funding, economic stagnation, and insecurity. Fewer international organizations engage with local radio for advertising and paid programming, while minimal economic growth and insecurity holds local businesses back from investing in advertising, especially in the highly rural environments where some stations are active and in which commercial activities are already slight. Business development activities on the part of station staff, accordingly, do not always bear fruit with the advertising market quickly exhausted within their limited coverage areas.

Local stations, in addition, face significant costs, notably energy costs. As few stations have consistent access to the electrical grid, most rely on diesel- or petrol-fueled generators to meet their energy needs, the cost of which can add up to \$747 USD per month as in the case of Radio Sol-e Paigham, Khost, or nearly a quarter of its total monthly expenses. For Radio Alina in Nuristan, monthly generator costs made up over 70% of total costs (\$374 USD of \$523 USD).

Half of the case study stations enjoyed a monthly surplus (the highest being \$747 USD in the case of Radio Milma in Paktika), whereas the other half experienced a monthly deficit (the highest being \$598 USD in the case of Radio Darman in Jawzjan). Monthly turnovers ranged from \$3,780 USD for Radio Milma to \$520 USD for Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor. These two stations also had the highest and lowest monthly costs of the case studies, \$3,033 USD and \$130 USD, respectively.

Finding 4: Organizational Sustainability

Local radio stations' access to and exploitation of both human and non-human resources is limited. Human resources concern the skills and diligence of management and staff. In regard to the former, experienced managers were seen to drive business development while their solid reputation within the community facilitated positive public perception of the station. Communities, in general, were quick to discern between managers genuinely interested in serving the community and those seeking self-enrichment.

Staff capacities, however, were in more dire straits. Many stations crippled in this respect relied overly on volunteers. While having volunteers among station staff can contribute positively to a radio station's sustainability because it allows for higher levels of community participation, there are several downsides to over-reliance on volunteerism that negatively impact levels of professionalism, continuity, and knowledge retention, and thus ultimately stations' sustainability prospects. These include volunteers' limited journalism skills and a higher rate of staff turnover as volunteers find paid employment. The latter, in turn, results in trainings being capped at the basics in lieu of long-term capacity building programs. A lack of rigorous recruitment policies and formal training were additional factors that impacted staff capacities.

Regarding non-human resources, access to up-to-date equipment, energy, and transportation were poor. Unstable, unreliable, and expensive electricity was the main reason for some of the stations' limited broadcast hours. A lack of transportation restricted field reporting and news coverage of remoter areas, in turn impacting stations' ability to be inclusive and representative of the different communities in their coverage area.

Information was the one resource stations had increasingly more access to, with the internet, and social media especially, playing a significant role in this regard. International websites are searched for news, educational content is sourced or verified online, and social media provide stations with localized information as well as an additional platform for community interaction and feedback off-air.

Finding 5: Political and Cultural Sustainability

Insecurity impacted almost all local radio stations, be it through targeted physical or verbal attacks, isolated or as parts of larger conflict events. Stations were targeted on account of their role as local watchdogs and as drivers of social change. As a consequence, stations practiced self-censorship, reporters' movements were circumscribed resulting in incomplete and uneven coverage of broadcast areas, and had fewer business development/advertising opportunities.

Stations need political goodwill in order to operate; to access and to verify information, and to ensure some measure of security. At the same time, local radio needs to be politically and editorially independent in order to serve the entirety of the communities within its coverage area, to be inclusive and representative, and to perform their role as local watchdog. As media outlets backed by political groups have recently proliferated, impacting audience's trust of media in general, political independence was also seen to be a major factor driving audience's appreciation of a radio station. Most stations were able to balance political neutrality and unbiased reporting with political goodwill and support networks that facilitate stations' work in terms of gaining access to information, and ensuring the station's and its staff's security.

Community support is of key importance to the sustainability of the stations, and from the outset, stations have made sure to embed themselves within the local community. Community elders were involved in stations' establishment, and local community members make up the station's staff. Community support is further cemented through outreach efforts by station management, perceptions of the station's political independence and its ability to serve as a watchdog as well as interaction with the community both on and off air, and programming that caters to community needs. Community support not only adds a network of security around stations, it also allows stations to push social boundaries, broach sensitive topics, and thus drive social change – but at a rate that does not risk severe community tensions.

Criticism of local radio's programming, both internally and externally produced, is not uncommon, however. Music, and the broadcasting of female voices particularly, elicited disapproval from more conservative elements within society. Stations coped with criticism by adjusting their programming, persevering in their editorial choices, or mediation.

Finding 6: Audience Sustainability

The ability of local radio stations to retain their audience in the face of increasing competition from other radio stations, both local and national, as well as other media such as printed press, television, and the internet, rests on three factors. First, the station's ability to cater to the needs of the communities in its broadcast area. Second, the station's ability to be inclusive and representative of the communities in its broadcast area. Finally, the station's ability to carve out a niche role for itself in order to minimize functional overlap with other media accessible in its broadcast area.

Local radio stations are perfectly positioned to cater to the needs of the communities within their broadcast area given their embeddedness within said communities but are presently not maximizing efforts to collect audience feedback in order to be able to produce highly relevant programming. This lack of effort is rooted in meagre financial resources as well as limited staff capacities. Gathering of audience feedback is insufficient and unsystematic, leaving gaps in knowledge that could be leveraged not only in regard to programming but also advertising. Stations do try and take into account what audience feedback they gather be that through personal interaction, calls to the studio or social media.

Local radio stations are equally well positioned to be inclusive and representative of the communities in their broadcast areas, employing local community members, speaking in local languages and using a colloquial lexicon. Stations try to cater to different segments of the community through their programming. This ability, however, for some stations was marred by a lack of women's involvement, alienating female audience members.

Local radio stations play a role within their communities as local information providers, local entertainers, local watchdogs, and as the voice of local civil society, that cannot be replicated by other media accessible to rural communities. Other media, for example, print media and the internet, do not have a sufficiently wide reach in these areas whilst national radio and television have a national rather than local focus which precludes them from tailoring their offering to specific localities.

Local radio has carved out a niche for itself that does not compete with national radio or television because it fulfills similar roles but on a local scale and thus answers different needs. These needs are not just about information and entertainment, but about belonging, inclusion, participation, joint efforts, agency, and development. Local radio is therefore likely to serve a sizeable audience in the near future also.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community radio plays a crucial role in providing information to rural areas of Afghanistan. While other mediums have increased their coverage in recent years, they cannot fill the same role, as provision of local information requires local presence. This localized information is crucial to creating interest and buy-in for rural communities.

However, the economic realities of Afghanistan today mean that commercial radio is unlikely to be self-sustaining in the near term. While stations should look to further community support, which creates additional ownership and improves the stations' standing with their listeners, sustained donor funding will be crucial to the health of these stations.

Financial Sustainability

Revenues

With economic stagnation, small advertising pools and risk-averse investment attitudes due to persisting insecurity, local commercial environments in Afghanistan at present cannot sustain local radio stations through advertising. Given the current economy, it is impossible that increasing advertising revenues could make up for dwindling donor resources. There is, accordingly, an undeniable need for additional forms of financial support. In the immediate term, this most likely means donor funding.

In the longer term, a new model of community contributions that at present stands unexplored might have the potential to further diversify funding, especially for stations that already rely heavily on donor funding. Despite high levels of poverty in rural Afghanistan, communities indicated their willingness to support their local radio station more concretely. Focus group respondents that did not already support the local radio station expressed their willingness to do so but stated that they were not aware of the types of support the station was in need of or how they could provide the station with support. Types of support could include donations, membership fees, fees for announcements, or sponsorship.

Sourcing funding from the community, however, requires high levels of community support and buy-in and is dependent on the reputation of the station and its management. It would, however, also empower communities with a sense of agency. The challenge in this regard, then, is to impart upon the community that the ultimate responsibility for the local radio station's sustainability lies with them, not with international donors.

Energy

In order to become more financially sustainable, stations need to secure access to reliable and inexpensive sources of electricity to meet their energy needs. While some stations have come up with creative solutions to meet their energy needs, these are not replicable across the sector and, therefore, not widely sustainable. Installing solar systems would be the most straightforward solution. Panels and batteries can be purchased across the country, and rural Afghanistan is already accustomed to working with them. Salam Watandar has already provided a number of its network stations with solar systems.

Organizational Sustainability

Human Resources: Volunteerism

Financial resources are key to diminishing reliance upon volunteers, and stations that pay salaries note higher levels of professionalism and rates of staff retention that allow them to focus on long-term capacity building programs that further incentivize staff to stay.

As most stations have meagre financial resources at their disposal, however, there are other measures that stations could implement outside of paying salaries. Participatory management styles wherein decisions are made in a consultative manner give staff the opportunity to take decisions and ownership of the station's success which could work as a disincentive for volunteers to leave the station. In addition, women are less likely to be looking for paid jobs outside the community and as volunteers are more likely to stay longer.

It should be noted that the challenge facing stations in regard to volunteerism goes to the heart of the model for local radio and its mission, that is, stations need to find a way of balancing their goal of capacity

building with professionalism, and without distancing those less skilled or alienating community members. Stations would do well, in this respect, to formulate a clear volunteer policy: a contractual program with a schedule and training mechanisms that volunteers participate in, and after which they are either taken on as paid staff or find a job elsewhere with their enhanced skill-set. A database of ex-volunteers can be drawn up to facilitate future recruitment, or to absorb any gaps in funding on an ad hoc basis.

Combatting disruptions in knowledge transmission due to high turnover rates, Salam Watandar has taken measures to make trainings last by providing video tutorials on technical subjects on CD. Developing this type of remote learning opportunity should be encouraged – as more stations have access to the internet, such remote learning could take the form of interactive, online modules. Additional measures could include enlisting the community – for example, asking successful business owners from the region to do a voluntary training on marketing, or journalists from the region that have moved to Kabul to host a one-day workshop on a particular topic at the local station.

Non-Human Resources

Station staff are already using the internet increasingly as an information resource that informs news reports and educational content. These efforts could be maximized by trainings on using the internet and social networks efficiently. For example, how to create a survey on Facebook, how to efficiently use search engines, or how to verify or double-check information sourced online. In addition, social media and websites will provide radio stations with additional platforms on which to engage with the community off-air, thus expanding their role as public 'community centers'. Social media and websites add a visual element to on-air reporting, allow for streaming, facilitate feedback gathering, and encourage public discourse.

Political and Cultural Sustainability Security

Individual security assessments for each station are warranted given high levels of insecurity. Each outlet operates in different settings, and faces different types of security threats that require different responses. Efforts to minimize the security risks associated with insurgency take a different shape than those that stem from pervasive violence against women, or localized tribal conflicts.

Following the security assessment, activities per security profile should be developed. These could include additional protection of the station premises, trainings, awareness and outreach campaigns. For example, staff members can be given a basic security training tailored to the specific issues they face. Such trainings could include de-escalation techniques and basic self-defense. Outreach programs to government officials that highlight the vested interest local governments have in functioning local media as a communication channel can help them take stations' security concerns more seriously, which in turn might work as a deterrent in regard to external threats.

Local radio stations should be further encouraged to cement their community networks as a security safety net. The ability of a station to embed itself within the community and foster community ties will provide a measure of protection against different forms of harassment. Stations should ask themselves how community linkages can be strengthened. For example, has a station reached out sufficiently to community elders, communicated to them its security concerns, and asked for their input? Relationships with the religious establishment are also important. As authoritative community members, *mullahs* have helped start and run stations, their local authority generating wider support for a station.

In addition, stations should be encouraged to coordinate with and join professional networks such as journalist, civil society, or media associations. Such networks bring power in numbers as well as the anonymity of speaking as part of a large group, and might lead to professional synergies. When information, for example, is particularly sensitive, local radio stations can share it between independent outlets and coordinate its release in order to avoid being singled out as a target. Finally, strategic linkages with the donor community can be paramount for ensuring the safety of radio staff members.

Political Goodwill and Independence

The aforementioned professional and community networks also allow stations to draw upon strength in numbers, and increase their political sustainability prospects.

In addition, as knowledge is power, station staff needs to be acquainted fully with the legal framework protecting them and their activities, for example, the Mass Media Law, the Right to Information Law as well as the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW). The law can be used as leverage when trying to gain access to information. Further sensitizing both station staff and government officials to the content of the relevant legal framework, and the responsibilities of each within it, should facilitate smoother and clarified working relationships between the two.

Audience Sustainability

In order to retain their 'local edge' and ability to provide highly-relevant and tailored information to their audience, stations need to maximize audience feedback gathering, community interaction and participation.

Audience Feedback

Stations recognized the need to better incorporate audience feedback into their decisionmaking. Stations should receive further training in ways that they can collect, review, and address audience feedback on a regular basis. There are a number of activities stations could undertake in order to solicit audience feedback with minimal expense.

As every station interviewed had a Facebook page, social media provides an opportunity for increasing and systematizing audience feedback that is inexpensive and requires little effort. Facebook allows page and group administrators to design short surveys, and to administer them on their page. While such a survey would target an unrepresentative sample, men with internet access mostly, it would provide a measure of additional information.⁴ Station staff can announce the survey on air, and ask listeners to fill out the survey with the female members of their household.

In addition, stations could organize quarterly events for audience members to mingle with station staff, reach out to community elders and other representatives of the community more, and draw increasingly upon their relationships with local CSOs to find out what issues are plaguing the community.

Finally, some stations already hold weekly staff meetings during which audience feedback is collated and discussed. This encourages staff members to systematically keep track of listener requests and community feedback, for example, by noting comments down in a notebook.

In regard to implementing audience feedback, stations would do well to emphasize their responsiveness on air, highlighting changes that have been made in programming and stating explicitly that these were implemented in order to meet audience demands as taking into account the audience's wishes was seen to positively affect perception of the station within the community.

Women's Involvement

Examples of stations that have hired women in the face of initial skepticism and criticism show that perseverance in this respect can bear fruit. Most noticed initial resistance from the community against female presenters on the radio. However, they also noted that this resistance was overcome reasonably quickly on account of exposure. Hearing a female voice on the radio became the new normal. In some instances, female presenters have even gathered quite a following.

Stations can facilitate this adaptation process by dedicating some of their educational programs to human and women's rights, especially within the context of Islam. Drawing upon local religious authorities, trusted by the community, and involving community elders as well as other community representatives such as CSO workers in a public discussion can pave the way for actually employing women. Examples, if there are any, of local women that have a solid religious reputation and are publicly active can also be highlighted.

Competition with Other Media

⁴ The 2016 Asia Foundation *Survey of the Afghan People* found that 32.6% of respondents in rural areas stated that they live in an area that has access to internet but only 11.2% had personal access to internet, be that by using a mobile phone with internet access or another device. Men were three times as likely to have personal access to internet (17%) as women (5.5%).

Given the superior resources of national radio stations such as the BBC and Radio Azadi, local radio stations need to capitalize on their local 'edge'. Stations can take inspiration from their national brothers in terms of mission and programming but consistently should translate this to a local level/format. As long as this is the case, and a minimum standard of professionalism and quality is upheld, local and national stations share little functional overlap.

In regard to balancing externally and internally produced programming, this also means that local radio stations should exert caution. While external programming provides them with a high-quality programming basis, it should remain that – a basis upon which stations can build their own locally-tailored programming.

De-conflicting the Model: Commercial versus Community

The boundaries between community and commercial radio in Afghanistan are blurred at the local level due to a lack of legislation and regulatory framework at the time stations were set up. The Salam Watandar network consists of a mixture of privately- and community-owned stations. Some are more geared towards community participation while others have gone down the road of commercial enterprises, with higher degrees of professionalism.

For local radio to retain its competitive 'edge' it might have to choose between a commercial and community model. Stations that are more community-centered than commercial give the community more of a say in programming, and more of a responsibility in keeping the radio financially afloat by donations, membership fees or participation in volunteering programs. Stations that are more commercial than community-centered in turn face fewer requirements of inclusion, participation, and representation. This allows stations to better deal with larger broadcast areas. These, in turn, can generate higher advertising revenues which could help pay for professional staff members.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

Radio has played an important role within the Afghan information context, a role that has seen significant change through the past 15 years. In 2005 radio was predominant, providing 85% of Afghans with access to information as well as entertainment. The rate of radio ownership lay at 83%, and was evenly distributed across country. Growing TV ownership (40%) was largely limited to the larger urban centers.⁵ By 2010, 68% of the surveyed population listened to radio as television had started to replace the latter as the most consumed media type, albeit predominantly in urban areas.

Studies have noted this increased media penetration, but have often focused primarily on urban areas.⁶ Altai Consulting's 2014 report *Afghan Media in 2014*, for example, found that television had become urban Afghans' most important information source. However, with higher levels of education, access, and affluence in urban settings, these findings do not necessarily translate to rural environments.

These statistics highlight changing usages of radio – both overall numbers of listeners as well as reasons for listening. As dynamics in the wider media landscape change, new forms of media are introduced and become increasingly widespread while others whither. Several developments in the media sector highlight concerns about the sustainability of local radio stations. These developments include decreasing international support to media, television diverting radio audiences wherever it is accessible, and audiences increasingly focusing on national rather than local media outlets. As a result, some provincial community radio stations have had to cease their activities while others operate below profitability.

Radio remains a primary information source for many households in rural areas where 75% of the population relies on radio broadcasts in order to meet information needs.⁷ Rural Afghanistan has historically had limited access to information through the media. Low literacy rates, insecurity, and poor infrastructure restrict access to print media, while lack of electricity, limited broadcast areas, and the cost of equipment and subscription services keep television ownership and usage relatively low.

Accordingly, the historical resilience of radio and its future prospects within Afghanistan's fluid media landscape, and in particular the viability of local radio stations' efforts to guarantee a minimum level of access to information to even the most remote communities, warrants in-depth analysis.

1.2. INTERNEWS AND THE SALAM WATANDAR NETWORK

In the years 2003 to 2011, the international NGO Internews established 36 community radio stations across 29 provinces in Afghanistan in order to address the lack of independent and localized information production and distribution, especially in rural areas.

Establishment of the first of these radio stations occurred at a time when media was generally distrusted, and the concept of community-based radio foreign to Afghanistan. While the stations initially operated within a media vacuum, they set a precedent and contributed significantly to the flourishing of the media sector in the country for the years that followed, including both commercial and state media. The network, furthermore, helped the international community meet its information dissemination needs and facilitated nation- and state-building processes.

In order to ensure minimum standards in the quantity and quality of content broadcast by these community radio stations, in 2005 Internews set up Salam Watandar, a Kabul-based production company. Salam Watandar produces programs that cover national and international news, issues such

⁵ *Afghan Media, Three Years After*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2005.

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⁷ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by the Asia Foundation, 2016.

as health, education, and rule of law as well as soap operas. Since 2007, these programs have been transmitted by satellite to the network of stations and broadcast locally between the peak hours of initially 7-8:30am and 6-7:30pm, and since 2016 the hours of 7-9am and 6-8pm.

In 2012, Salam Watandar became an independent organization and registered as an NGO by the legal name of ‘Salam Watandar Organization Afghanistan.’ Since 2015, the organization is registered with the Ministry of Economy as ‘Salam Afghanistan Media Organization’ (SAMO). SAMO aims to serve as a leading media outlet offering a wide range of multimedia services under one roof: Salam Watandar Kabul (98.9 FM), Salam Watandar News Agency, Multimedia Production House, Media Monitoring & Evaluation Center, Research & Strategic Communication Center, Media Training Hub, and Media Tech Workshop. Salam Watandar’s local radio station network has since expanded its network from the initial 36 Internews-established stations to include privately set-up stations that recognized the appeal of its content and support services. Today, the Salam Watandar network consists of 74 full and limited partner stations.⁸

1.3. STUDY OBJECTIVES

In 2016, Internews mandated Altai Consulting to assess the sustainability of independent local radio stations in Afghanistan within the context of a dwindling economy, steadily decreasing donor funds, and a competitive and increasingly sophisticated media landscape that includes both television and internet in addition to radio services.⁹

This document is divided into 3 main sections:

- 1) The story of radio since 2001 and the development of the Internews-created network
- 2) An analysis of the role and impact of rural radio in Afghanistan
- 3) An analysis of the sustainability of rural radio stations in Afghanistan

Beyond this, recommendations are included regarding the potential for improving the impact and sustainability of rural radio. The annex includes detailed case studies on the 10 rural radio stations visited for this work.

The research focuses on 30 stations that were established by Internews and are now full partners of Salam Watandar.

Table 1: The scope of the research concerns 30 stations established by Internews and now part of the Salam Watandar network

Full Partner	Limited Partner
Monthly stipend of maximum 28,000 AFN	
Technical Support	
2 to 4 hours of Salam Watandar Content Broadcasting between 7-9AM and 6-8PM.	2 to 4 hours of Salam Watandar Broadcasting between 7-9AM and 6-8PM.

The study will look most closely at stations operating within a media-scarce environment, typically radio stations broadcasting from small district capitals or other towns where no other media sources, or a

⁸ *Vulnerable Radio Stations & Their Sustainability: An Assessment of 10 Vulnerable Radio Stations*, report prepared by Salam Afghanistan Media Organization (Najib Yourish and Zamir Mirzada), January 2016: 3 - Note that network affiliation is constantly changing with new stations entering the network whilst others exit.

⁹ *Overview: Afghanistan*, report prepared by the World Bank, 2016. GDP growth slowed to 1.5% in 2015 following the withdrawal of most international troops in 2014, increased insecurity and a drop in foreign investment. Note that the international community pledged \$15.2 billion in donor funding at the Brussels Conference for Afghanistan in October 2016.

limited number of media sources, are active. In such scenarios, these stations are likely to be the only formal source of information serving a community, and can thus play a critical role.

While the stations under examination stood at the vanguard of local radio in Afghanistan, they presently encompass only a part of this sector in Afghanistan, albeit a significant one. It is, however, hoped that the insights gained from their analysis will shed light on the issues affecting the sustainability of rural radio in general. Consequently, the generic term 'local radio stations' is employed to denote the Internews-established Salam Watandar partner stations under examination.

The main goal of the research was to provide Internews as well as international donors and other stakeholders with a comprehensive analysis of the sustainability of local radio stations in Afghanistan in order to better understand the breadth and consequences of current developments within the media sector, to anticipate future opportunities and challenges, and to inform support activities to local radio in the years ahead. Specifically, two objectives were pursued:

Objective 1: Assess the role and impact of local radio stations in terms of better access to information for the communities that they serve.

Objective 2: Assess the conditions that are necessary for local radio stations to remain sustainable, and to continue contributing to better access to information.

In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, the research sought to answer the following questions:

- A) What is the role and impact of provincial community stations within their immediate environment?
- B) How sustainable are provincial community radio stations?
- C) How are community radio services likely to change in the coming years and why do they warrant continued support?

A cross-cutting theme running throughout these questions concerned the involvement of women in the building up of community radio stations, and the effects thereof.

1.4. APPROACH

The study focuses on three modules:

- (1) In-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the Internews/Salam Watandar story as well as key stakeholders involved in media operations and development at the central/Kabul level
- (2) 10 in-depth case studies with provincial Salam Watandar partner stations
- (3) 20 in-depth interviews by phone with the remaining Internews-established full Salam Watandar partners

Figure 1: Map of Afghanistan with case study provinces highlighted

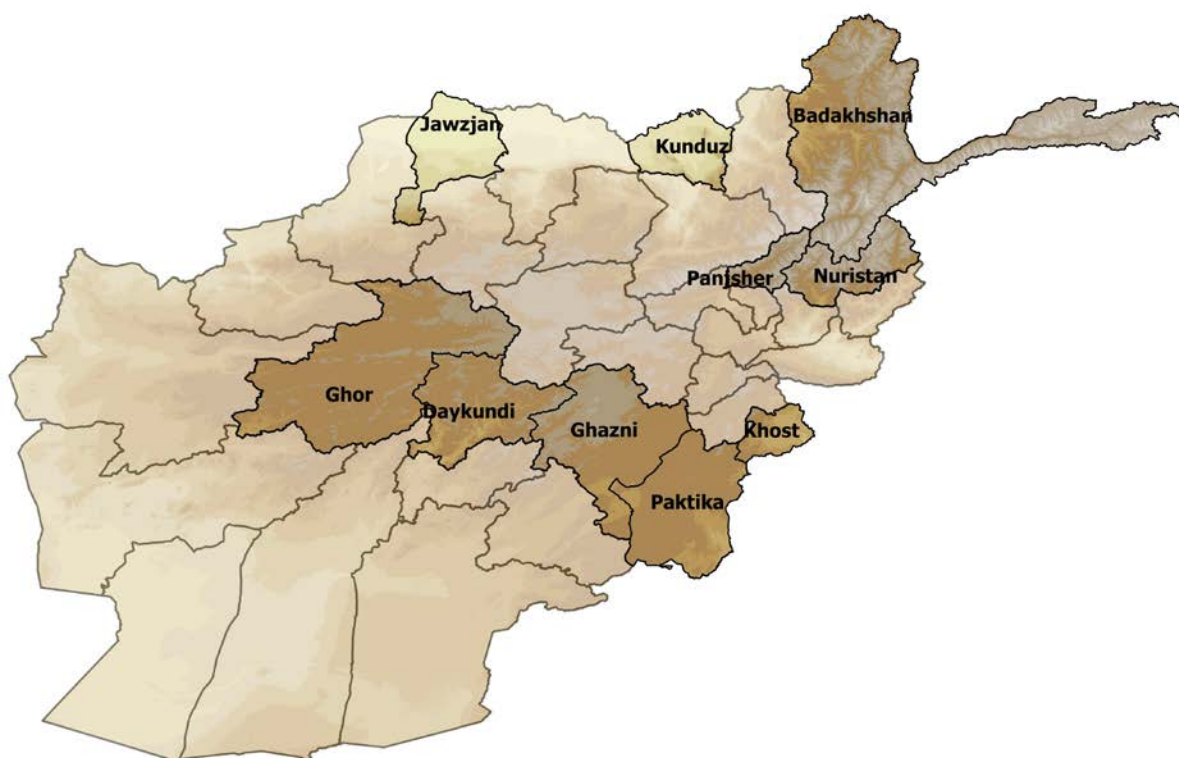
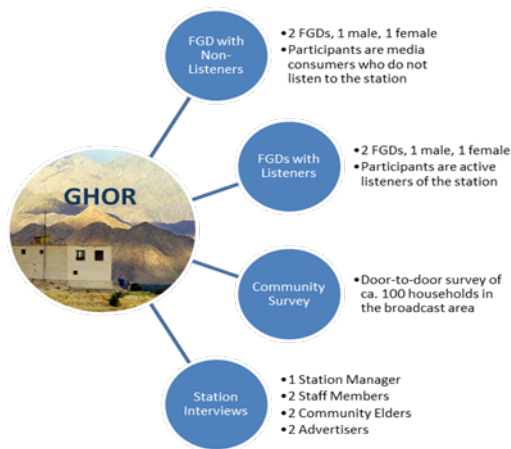


Table 2: Case study locations and activities

Province	District	Case Studies	KIIs	FGDs	Audience Survey
Ghazni	Jaghuri	1	7	4	92
Daikundi	Center	1	7	4	96
Ghor	Center	1	7	4	87
Nuristan	Nurgram	1	1	0	14
Badakhshan	Kishim	1	7	4	75
Jawzjan	Aqcha	1	7	4	76
Kunduz	Center	1	7	0	96
Khost	Center	1	7	4	102
Paktika	Center	1	7	4	70
Panjshir	Center	1	5	4	100
Total		10	62	32	808

Interviews in module 1 provide a broad view of the historical development and context of support for rural radio, as well as information regarding the donor and regulatory environments, among other important elements.

Figure 2: Case Study Components



Work in modules 2 and 3 allow detailed information regarding the current function and support for rural radio. Case studies included extensive interviews with station ownership and staff in order to fully understand the operations, decision-making, and financial situation of stations. For each case study, a door-to-door community survey was also conducted, allowing an approximation to be made of listenership and perspectives on the station. This was followed by focus group discussions with both listeners and non-listeners, including both men and women in each community, in order to understand the importance of radio within the wider information context, as well as the reasons for listening to (or not listening to) the station in question. Full details of the study's methodology can be found in Annex B.

2. INTERNEWS AND RADIO IN AFGHANISTAN

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Afghanistan's media landscape in 2001 was functionally non-existent. Re-building the media sector was considered an essential component of international efforts to re-build the country. Radio played a crucial role in this respect given Afghans' familiarity with the medium, its accessibility, and devices' low energy consumption.
- The case was made for local, community-based radio as a means of informing Afghanistan's largely rural population of reconstruction developments as well as empowering these communities and contributing to local processes of democratization and citizen participation.
- Between 2003 and 2011 Internews helped establish 36 local radio stations in often rural and media-starved parts of Afghanistan. The organization's decentralized network of local, independent radio stations set a precedent that contributed significantly to the flourishing of the media sector post-2001.
- Salam Watandar, initially a content-production unit of Internews, was spun off as an independent organization in 2012 and expanded the network. The Salam Watandar network today includes 74 full and limited partners.
- Salam Watandar not only provides partners with centrally produced programming but a monthly stipend, technical support, trainings, and security and emergency support.

Afghanistan's media landscape developed rapidly following the fall of the Taliban in 2001 with different types of media outlets proliferating. Within the span of a decade, media had become a profitable industry that included increasingly sophisticated national and local radio stations as well as a growing number of television stations. By 2014, television had started to replace radio as the medium of choice in urban areas while radio consumption was fading. The rapid growth that marked these years, however, was not considered sustainable and in recent years has plateaued somewhat. Competition among media outlets remains fierce, leading to both segmentation and professionalization of media outlets in order to continue to attract diminishing advertising revenues. Internet has also made its entry into Afghanistan with an increasing proportion of young urbanites accessing information using 3G.¹⁰

Over the course of these past fifteen years, media support has taken on three predominant shapes, targeting infrastructure, institutional strengthening, and content support. Organizations such as Internews have initiated activities across these three categories. In terms of infrastructure, Internews established a network of local radio stations that by 2011 spanned over 36 outlets, taking charge of the initial set-up as well as providing financial and technical assistance. In regard to institutional strengthening, Internews provided these stations with various trainings. From 2005 onwards it has helped produce innovative and relevant content through Salam Watandar providing its network of stations with initially 3, then 4 hours of programming every day.

The next section traces the development of radio over the course of the last fifteen years, particularly local radio, and the crucial role of Internews therein.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL RADIO IN AFGHANISTAN POST-2001

The media landscape in Afghanistan immediately following the fall of the Taliban government in 2001 was marked by vacuum. The Taliban had prohibited all television broadcasts, destroying antennas and transmitters, and had shut down all radio stations with the exception of Radio Afghanistan, which was renamed Radio Shari and broadcast on mediumwave from Kabul. To a very limited extent, Afghans had access to international media broadcasting on AM shortwave from neighboring countries such as BBC Persian and BBC Pashto from Peshawar in Pakistan as well as Voice of America.¹¹ In

¹⁰ *Afghan Media in 2014*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2014

¹¹ *The potential for Community Radio in Afghanistan: Report of a Fact-Finding Mission*, report prepared by Communica, 2002

the absence of non-state media, there was a corresponding absence of formalized legal or regulatory framework.¹²

The international community identified the need for a vibrant media sector as part of Afghanistan’s reconstruction.¹³ Since the fall of the Berlin wall, international organizations have seen media as a key tool to rebuild fragile societies. In this regard, the international community’s short-term aim in supporting media activities was to raise public awareness of its activities, and to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan population: it was in need of an effective medium with national reach to spread its messages even to the most remote communities. Its long-term goal focused on the creation of a free and independent media sector to support processes of democratization, nation- and state-building.¹⁴

THE CASE FOR COMMUNITY RADIO

Considering different media support activities, one of the options explored by the international community alongside television and national radio was community radio. That is, independent radio rooted within and broadcasting for the benefit of a local community.¹⁵

The case made for community radio was straightforward.¹⁶ The majority of Afghans could not read with literacy rates estimated around 38%, the country’s telecommunications infrastructure had been devastated, and vast parts of the country had no, or very limited, access to electricity minimizing the potential impact of television.¹⁷ Finally, the country’s largely poor and rural population was unlikely to invest in television sets.

Positively, many Afghans already had access to radio receivers and were accustomed to using these to meet their information needs even during the Taliban

years. Local radio stations were relatively easy to establish, requiring minimal equipment, and provided a solution to the identified twin problems of rural communities lacking information, and the need for humanitarian, development, and state-building efforts to reach these communities.

Focus Box: Categories of Radio in Afghanistan

Community radio can be distinguished from 4 other categories of radio: foreign radio services with an Afghan production center and nationwide reach via AM shortwave such as the BBC and Radio Azadi, government radio (Radio Afghanistan), commercial radio services broadcasting via FM, and foreign stations broadcasting from neighboring countries.



ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNEWS’ AFGHAN NETWORK

Internews Network, a media NGO based in northern California, had initially wanted to set up an independent national network that would broadcast centrally-produced programming via a grid of regional FM repeaters. The Ministry of Information and Culture, however, feared this effort would compete directly with its own radio outlet, Radio Afghanistan.

¹² *The potential for Community Radio in Afghanistan: Report of a Fact-Finding Mission*, report prepared by Communica, 2002; *Afghanistan: Media and Election Processes*, report prepared by Jackie Sutton, 2012

¹³ *Afghanistan Media Assessment: Opportunities and Challenges for Peacebuilding*, report prepared by United States Institute of Peace, 2010

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *The potential for Community Radio in Afghanistan: Report of a Fact-Finding Mission*, report prepared by Communica, 2002; *Afghan Media: Three Years After*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2005.

¹⁶ *The potential for Community Radio in Afghanistan: Report of a Fact-Finding Mission*, report prepared by Communica, 2002

¹⁷ CIA World Fact Book (last updated June 2016): <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2103.html> (accessed December 2016)

With the support of OTI, Internews refocused on building a decentralized network of local radio stations that produced local content to cater to their communities' needs. An added benefit was that local stations would have to build support within the community in order to be successful. In this way, embedding stations in the local community would to some measure ensure the security of the station, its staff, and equipment.

In addition, the station would provide citizens with a public forum for debate rather than just disseminate information, and thus contribute to processes of democratization. Finally, the network of local stations could still broadcast centrally-produced programming aimed at a national audience.

In February 2003, Internews received a grant from OTI for the establishment of 14 local stations, including needed equipment as well as training of staff.¹⁸ In March 2005, Internews received additional funds for the establishment of another 20 local radio stations.

Internews considered two principal criteria in the establishment of a new station. Firstly, the station's geographic location and audience – remote and rural areas where the potential audience had little to no access to any other source of information - were preferred. Secondly, the potential partner (the owner and/or manager of the radio station) had to demonstrate community support for the endeavor, be it in the form of land donations, housing, or a pledge from local councils to pay some expenses, in order to ensure the political and cultural viability of the station.

36 stations were established between 2003 and 2011, a time when media was initially distrusted, and the concept of community-based radio foreign to Afghanistan. Some of these stations were managed and staffed exclusively by women (with the exception of security staff). For example, Radio Rabia Balkhi in Mazar-e Sharif, Radio Zohra in Kunduz, and Radio Sahar in Herat.¹⁹

Each newly-established station received a start-up package consisting of equipment, financial assistance, and training. Stations were provided with microphones, tape recorders, a 150 Watt FM transmitter, a 30-meter tower, a generator, and solar panels.²⁰ These were installed by Internews' technical team. Internews also paid start-up costs totaling 3,000 USD per month, which included staff salaries.

Before a station began broadcasting, its staff was sent to Kabul for a three-week course on the basics of journalism and technical training at the Internews premises. Upon their return to the station, an Internews trainer accompanied them to oversee the first 10 days of the station's broadcast. The total costs for setting up a station ranged from 12,000-70,000 USD.

Local independent radio was previously unknown to Afghanistan and brought the production of media to the local level, outside of the country's major cities. Having set a precedent, many other private stations have since been established outside the scope of the Internews network with the years 2004-2009 particularly active. These local radio stations have become a vital component of the media landscape. A random sample of the local radio stations established in those years include those shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Selection of stations established outside of most active period

Name Radio	Province	Established
Radio Arezoha	Baghlan	2007
Radio Paiman	Baghlan	2006
Radio Killid (Balkh)	Balkh	2007
Radio Arezo	Balkh	2007
Radio Nehad	Balkh	2007
Radio Setara-e-Sahar	Balkh	2006
Radio Killid (Herat)	Herat	2006
Radio Watandar (Herat)	Herat	2007
Radio Shahr (Mazar)	Balkh	2009
Radio Samoon	Helmand	2006
Radio Muska	Helmand	2008

¹⁸ The initial OTI grant period ran from February 2003 to June 2004.

¹⁹ These stations were funded by the Canadian NGO IMPACS.

²⁰ All equipment remained the property of Internews which has the right to reclaim these. Equipment was also donated to stations by ISAF and local PRTs.

Focus Box: Defining Independent Local Radio

In many countries, community radio is subjected to legislation that sets out its purpose and limitations. For example, community radio stations are often not allowed to be profitable or pursue commercial advertising, and have to be owned by community bodies such as social organizations.²¹ In the absence of any legal framework to guide local media, Internews' definition of its radio network remained flexible. Independent, local radio stations were to a) give communities the information they need to be informed and to make decisions about issues affecting them, b) to make editorial decisions without the influence of the radio station owners or other powerful people, and c) to serve as a conduit that not only informs local communities, but allows them to let their views be known to the authorities, international community, and civil society.²² The stations are local because they serve a circumscribed locality, speak in truly local voices, and are inclusive of the local community in terms of age, gender, social status, and ethnicity.

Outside of these criteria, Internews could be flexible, retaining some features of community radio while discarding others. For example, in addition to communal ownership, private ownership of a radio station and broadcasting license was allowed if the station could demonstrate strong community support. In addition, stations were encouraged to be profitable and pursue commercial advertising. OTI and Internews believed local radio stations could promote democratic processes and civil society whilst operating as commercial enterprises.

CONTINUING SUPPORT

Internews' subsequent involvement with the network's radio stations was largely institutional and consisted of training, business development assistance, and content production.

TRAINING

Internews has provided trainings for local radio station staff, both technical and editorial, and including trainings on the basics of journalism and the use of equipment. Training needs and programs are designed and implemented on the basis of a three-step process. First, an assessment is made of a station's needs in regard to training on the basis of discussions with station management and staff. Having identified the knowledge gaps, be they technical or editorial, training modules are designed. Modules range from media law, to investigative journalism, editorial trainings, media sales, election coverage, and equipment usage. Station staff is then invited to Kabul for a week-long training program.

In addition to in-person trainings, Internews provides support to Salam Watandar to produce video tutorials recorded on DVDs for stations. Currently, 10 video tutorials on 10 different technical topics ranging from how to use a microphone to proper installment of a dipole are available. Video tutorials are cost-effective ways of transferring knowledge, saving station staff the cost and time of travel, and ensuring knowledge is not lost as some staff members leave and newcomers arrive.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Internews has supported stations in its network in their business development and marketing efforts. In 2004, Internews took two business development trainers on staff in Kabul. These trainers helped stations build tailored business models and rational, competitive advertising rate cards. For stations in small towns where local businesses would not be able to generate significant advertising revenues, alternative income sources were pursued. These stations, for example, were encouraged to charge a small sum for reading wedding and death announcements or to sell coupons to listeners for song requests. In the same year, Internews also began to finance the position of Advertising and Business Director for each network station for 6 months and paid a 12% commission on any advertising these individuals generated.

CONTENT

Internews recognized that stations had limited capacity to produce good quality programming. In order to address this, in 2004 Internews established Salam Watandar, a Kabul-based production company,

²¹ *What is Community Radio? A Resource Guide*, report prepared by AMARC Africa and Panos Southern Africa, 1998.

²² *Starting a Local Radio Station: A Manual for Afghanistan*, report prepared by Parisa Saadatmand-Zitouni, 2011.

to provide stations with a base of public service content with which to build an audience as they developed their own local production capacity. Salam Watandar focused on producing programs with a national focus that local radio stations would be challenged to produce, thus exposing local stations to new formats and ideas that could be adapted to local tastes in internal programs. Broadcasts commenced in 2004 with a 90-minute morning and evening broadcast that mixed news and entertainment.

Salam Watandar's programs were burnt on CDs and initially distributed daily through the Tanin distribution network.²³ In 2007 distribution of Salam Watandar programming was shifted to satellite.²⁴ Network stations were given a satellite receiver, which a technical team was sent to install. Programs were now transmitted in real-time from Salam Watandar's studios in Kabul, received by local stations using standard digital television satellite decoders, and rebroadcast over their local transmitter.

THE SALAM WATANDAR NETWORK

Under the USAID-funded Afghanistan Media Development and Empowerment Program (AMDEP - implemented by Internews between 2010-2013), Salam Watandar was spun off as an independent organization with complete editorial independence, and registered as an NGO with the Ministry of Economy.²⁵

Salam Watandar formalized and expanded the network of stations that broadcast its programming. By 2013, the end of the AMDEP period, the network included over 50 stations, many of which had not been established by Internews. Presently, in 2016, the Salam Watandar network consists of 74 full and part-time partners, 30 of which were originally established by Internews.²⁶

Before a station is admitted to Salam Watandar's network it is required to meet certain criteria:

- (1) The station should be politically and editorially independent, technically sustainable, and located in a region of Afghanistan that is not already covered by any of Salam Watandar's other partners.
- (2) A station must be in the possession of a broadcasting certificate from the Ministry of Information and Culture as well as a frequency license from the Afghanistan Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (ATRA).
- (3) The station should be popular within the community and gender-sensitive in its programming. Where possible, the gender of station staff should be balanced.

Network affiliation is based on a Memorandum of Understanding, signed between the station owner and Salam Watandar. Stations can choose between two types of partnerships. Full partners are required to air 4 hours Salam Watandar programming during the peak hours of 7-9am and 6-8pm every day. Limited partners are required to broadcast Salam Watandar for only 2 hours per day. Full network partners receive the following support:

Monthly Stipend: Salam Watandar dispenses a monthly stipend to stations (28,000 AFN for 4 hours of broadcasting or 14,000 AFN for two hours of broadcasting).²⁷ Part of this stipend is paid by Salam Watandar through its concept of 'revenue sharing'. Salam Watandar sells advertising space on its programs to international organizations with a presence in Afghanistan as well as companies such as Alokozay, Roshan, MTN, and Etisalat. Income thus generated is proportionally distributed among the partner stations that air the program with the advertisements on the basis of a tiered system that is dependent on the coverage of the station.²⁸ Salam Watandar's most significant donors are the US

²³ Established by Internews and Aina, and funded by OTI and EC.

²⁴ The satellite uplink was initially funded by USAID at an annual cost of \$60,000, and is now subsidized by Salam Watandar.

²⁵ Internews signed a cooperative agreement with USAID on 1 November 2010 to implement AMDEP until 31 December 2013. The aim was to develop the Afghan media sector nationwide through a) support for regional broadcast stations, b) the capacity building of local media outlets, and c) increasing access to media technology.

²⁶ Note that network affiliation is constantly changing with new stations entering the network whilst others exit.

²⁷ If a radio station has a very small coverage area it is paid 14,000 AFN for four hours of broadcasting. Broadcasts are checked by about 20 stringers that are active in the provinces, continuously listening to the radio. If there is a broadcast shortfall, payments are adjusted accordingly. Stations also provide Salam Watandar with broadcast certificates at the end of each of the year's 12 fiscal periods. Stations are also obliged to disclose the number of staff members and salaries. These numbers are checked through unannounced visits to the station by stringers.

embassy in Kabul, DFID, USAID via Internews, the Canadian embassy in Kabul, and various UN agencies. Organizations can request to target only parts of the Salam Watandar network.

Technical Support: Repair and maintenance of station equipment by Salam Watandar’s technical team is free of charge for partner stations. Equipment can either be sent to Kabul or Salam Watandar can send its technical team to the station. The station, however, bears the cost for equipment transportation, the transportation and accommodation of the technical team as well as any replacement parts. Stations can also always call Salam Watandar’s technical team for troubleshooting, and Salam Watandar will call stations back if the conversation is likely to take long so as to save the station from paying for telephone charges. Salam Watandar also provides new partner stations with a satellite receiver if they did not already possess one and has installed solar systems in some stations to help them cope with electricity costs.

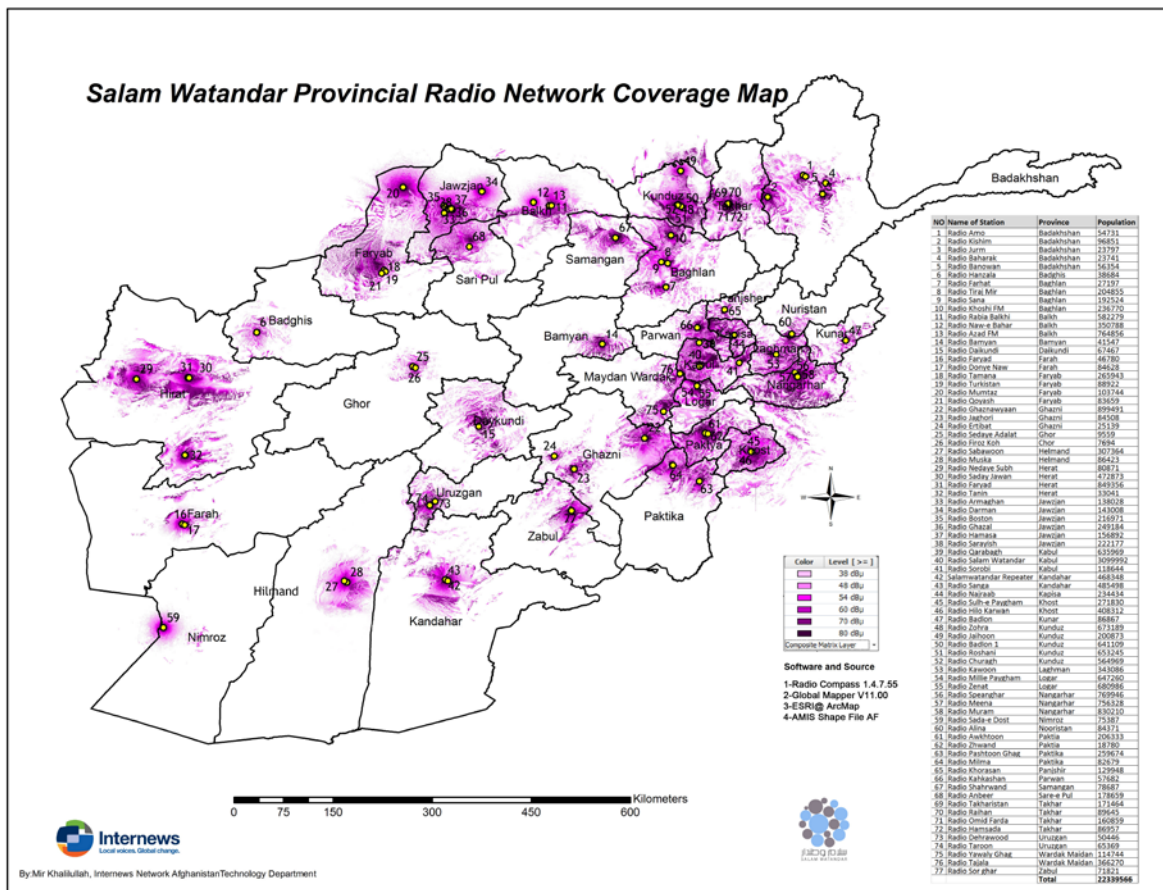
Training and organizational support: Network stations have access to the video tutorials on technical subjects produced by Salam Watandar as well as tailored trainings in Kabul. Network stations often do not have financial or human resource departments, and so support teams at Salam Watandar’s offices in Kabul help stations manage their daily affairs via Skype or phone if needed.

Emergency and security support: Salam Watandar provides emergency and security support to its network stations when and where it can.

SALAM WATANDAR IN 2016

Salam Watandar in 2016 broadcasts 24 hours a day, covering all 34 of Afghanistan’s provinces.

Figure 3: Salam Watandar provincial radio network coverage



²⁸ Coverage of each station is calculated on the basis of the height of the station’s antenna and tower, the GPS coordinates of the tower, and the power of the transmitter and dipole. All data is entered into a software program which calculates the station’s broadcast area.

Salam Watandar has also improved its website which now features three types of content across 8 categories (politics; security; world; society; economy; culture; education; sports). These types of content are radio programs (to which audience members can listen online), featured articles in 4 languages (Dari, Pashto, Uzbek, and English), and reviews of yesterday's newspapers. Salam Watandar has also expanded its social media presence via Facebook, Twitter, and Google+.

A newly minted Research, Evaluation, and Learning (REL) Unit studies local communities and Afghan society at large to enhance the relevance of Salam Watandar programming and to inform the international community in its strategic communications decision-making process. Finally, since 2015, Salam Watandar has incorporated pioneering audience feedback using social media, focus group discussions, and surveys to test new programming ideas.

3. ROLE & IMPACT OF RURAL RADIO

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In rural areas, radio remains the medium of choice for accessing information. This is the case even though the types and quantity of available media, notably television and to a minor extent internet, is growing, particularly in semi-rural areas such as rural provincial and district centers. Accessibility is growing, however, unevenly with certain areas remaining under-served.
- Radio usage in rural Afghanistan has diversified both in terms of the groups within society that listen to radio, as well as the times that radio is listened to and the manner in which it listened to (privately or communally).
- Local radio programming caters to different segments of society. Radio can, therefore, reach a cross-section of rural communities, including men and women, elderly and young people.
- Local radio's predominant roles are that of information provider, entertainer, educator, and watchdog. Stations provide international, national, and local news as well as information on practical, community-related matters. As an educator, stations make use of interactive program formats that offer listeners engaging learning-experiences. As a watchdog, local radio bridges the gap between the community and the authorities by raising the voice of the former and demanding accountability from the latter.
- Local radio stands out for its ability to pinpoint specific needs within the communities it serves in respect to information and education gaps as well as public grievances, and to address these accordingly. Local radio's impact, therefore, is highly localized and consequently tailored and effective.

3.1. RURAL ACCESS TO MEDIA

Information networks in rural Afghanistan differ depending on the types of media available. While some areas have access to a broad range of information sources including radio, television, and internet, other areas are information-poor, and must rely primarily on word-of-mouth. Most communities, however, lay somewhere between these extremes, with radio particularly broadcasting to many rural areas that previously had limited access to information.

The discussion below describes access to and use of media in rural communities, focused on the ten communities examined through case studies and supported by secondary sources. These communities are in many ways typical of 'intermediary' regions, rural communities that still represent a significant population center, but where access to television and internet is sometimes still limited. These communities are often rural provincial or district centers, and so represent a higher potential access to media than the rural villages radio broadcast from these areas may also serve.

Radio

While access to television and even internet has now spread somewhat beyond Afghanistan's largest cities, radio remains the primary source of information for most rural residents. Among those surveyed for this study, 81% had a radio at home, with 13% tuning in 'every day', 6% 'often' and 46% 'sometimes'.²⁹ This 65% of individuals in the case study areas who rely to some extent on radio can be compared to results of the 2016 Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People, which states that nationally 74.4% of rural respondents rely on radio as their primary source of

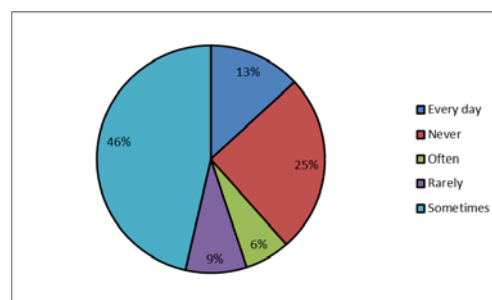


Figure 4: Frequency of Radio Use Among Media Users in Case Study Areas

²⁹ These percentages applied equally to male and female respondents.

information.³⁰ In fact, a number of recent studies have found that radio continues to be a preferred means of accessing information, especially in energy-poor and non-urban areas.³¹

In addition, rising mobile phone ownership rates in recent years have facilitated access to radio as most mobile phones have in-built FM receivers that allow owners to listen to FM radio at no additional cost, in private using earphones, and without reliance upon electricity.³²

The variety of radio stations accessible to the community within each rural area surveyed, however, differed drastically. A distinction can be made between three categories of radio outlets. First are international outlets with an Afghan presence such as the BBC, Radio Azadi (Radio Free Europe), and Radio Ashna (Voice of America). All broadcast on AM shortwave whilst the BBC and Radio Azadi are also available on FM in Afghanistan's major urban centers. Second are national or regional radio stations, including the government's Radio Afghanistan (RTA) as well as commercial radio stations such as Radio Arman and Radio Kilid, all broadcast on FM. Third are local community radio stations, broadcasting on FM.³³

As both the BBC and Radio Azadi broadcast on AM shortwave, they are accessible virtually throughout Afghanistan. Access to FM radio, however, differs vastly for different regions. Communities in the Bazarak district of Panjshir and the Aqcha district in Jawzjan, for example, had access to only one FM radio station. In other rural areas, a vibrant and competitive radio landscape has begun to develop. In Daikundi, for example, three local FM stations in Nilli City (Radio Nasim, Radio Aftab, and Radio Daikundi) compete for audience share. In urban centers such as Kunduz City, a total of seven local FM radio stations are active in addition to two local television stations, Khawar and Roshani. Such variety shows that increased media penetration, and competition among media, is not a homogenous phenomenon across Afghanistan but at present remains highly localized.

Television

Previous studies have pointed to increasing television ownership and usage rates but also noted that these developments were restricted largely to urban areas.³⁴ According to the Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People, television usage is still growing, including among rural populations. The percentage of rural respondents stating that they use television as a means to access information, however, was 58%.³⁵

Among respondents in the case study areas, the rate of TV ownership lay at 80% with 33% of respondents watching 'every day', 6% watching 'often' and 35% 'sometimes'. Such findings, whilst not based on a representative sample, suggest that television ownership and usage patterns have shifted in recent years from a predominantly urban phenomenon to reach more semi-rural areas. The large difference between usage rates from the case studies to other recent surveys such as that of the Asia Foundation survey suggest that although usage has grown in rural provincial and district centers, outside of these centers usage remains low.

The increased availability of relatively inexpensive solar systems, including solar powered television sets, has played a significant role in this regard as insufficient and inconsistent electricity supply continues to plague rural Afghanistan.³⁶ Anecdotal observations and secondary sources suggest that

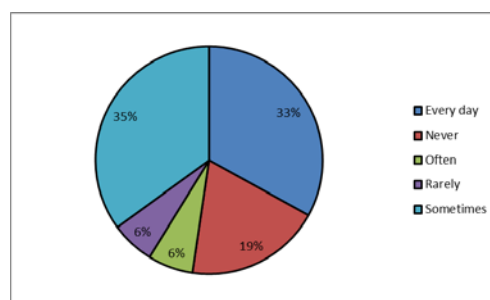


Figure 5: Frequency of Television Use Among Media Users in Case Study Areas

³⁰ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by the Asia Foundation 2016.

³¹ *Afghan Information Ecosystems*, report prepared by Sayara, 2016.

³² *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by the Asia Foundation 2016: 11; The survey found that the rate of personal ownership of mobile phones in rural areas was 50% with men twice as likely as women to own a device.

³³ *Afghan Media*, paper prepared by Makhfi Azizi, N/A

³⁴ *Afghanistan Media Survey*, report prepared by the BBC Trust, 2008; The survey indicated that 89% of households in urban areas had access to TV whereas in rural areas this percentage was only 26%. *Afghan Media, Three Years After*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2005; *The State of Afghan Media*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2010.

³⁵ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by The Asia Foundation, 2016: 131

³⁶ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by The Asia Foundation, 2016: 79; *Afghanistan Country Opinion Survey Report 2015*, report prepared by the World Bank Public Opinion Research Group, 2015; The World Bank estimated in summer

households across rural Afghanistan have invested in alternative means of generating electricity and often use the additional energy to watch television.

While this shift diversifies the types media accessible to rural populations and increases access to both information and entertainment, it does not, however, validate claims about television surpassing radio as the media of choice across Afghanistan.

Internet

Access to and usage of the internet is a rapidly-growing but still marginal phenomenon in rural areas.³⁷ The 2016 Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People found that 32.6% of respondents in rural areas live in an area that has access to the internet but only 11.2% had personal access to the internet, be it by using a mobile phone with internet access or another device.

Internet usage is marked by both an urban-rural divide, a gender divide, and an age gap. The same Asia Foundation survey notes internet usage rates of 7% in rural areas, and 25% in urban environments.³⁸ Men were three times as likely to have personal access to the internet (17%) as women (5.5%).³⁹ Interviews with community elders and focus group discussions further indicated that it was predominantly young and better-educated people that used the internet.

Despite internet usage growing, access to the medium is bound to remain limited in rural areas in the immediate future as high illiteracy rates, gender dynamics, and a lack of electricity preclude widespread usage. Among this study's focus group discussion participants, virtually all, both men and women, stated that they have access to radio and television, while far fewer also had access to the internet.

Print Media

With literacy rates at 38% across the country (52% among men and 24% among women), the offering of print media remains hindered by constraints on the demand side, especially in low-literacy provinces such as Ghor.⁴⁰ In addition, access to print media is also limited by poor built infrastructure and insecurity reducing incentives for publishers to distribute print media in the country's more remote areas.⁴¹ In Daikundi, for example, of the 17 local print publications once available, as of February 2015, not one is in circulation.⁴²

CONCLUSION

In rural areas, radio remains the medium of choice for accessing information. This is the case even though the types and quantity of available media, notably television and to a minor extent internet, is growing, particularly in semi-rural areas such as rural provincial and district centers. Accessibility is growing, however, unevenly with certain areas remaining under-served. These differing contexts set differing parameters for the potential impact of radio upon both increased access to information and social change.

2015 that 38% of the Afghan population was connected to the electric grid including more than three quarters of the population in urban areas (Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif) versus less than 10% of the overall rural population. Most Afghans, accordingly, rely on alternative sources of energy. According to the Central Statistics Organization (CSO), 89% of Afghans has access to some form of electricity whether via generators, solar or hydropower in 2014. For many Afghans, access to electricity is affected by changes in the economy, including relative purchasing power for fuel and solar panels, or the affordability of electricity bills.

³⁷ *Afghanistan Profile - Media*, article prepared by the BBC, 2015: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12013942>

³⁸ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by the Asia Foundation, 2016: 131.

³⁹ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by the Asia Foundation, 2016: 12.

⁴⁰ CIA Factbook, last updated Oct. 2016. Female literacy rate 2015 estimate for population 15 years and older

⁴¹ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by the Asia Foundation, 2016; *The State of Afghan Media*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2010.

⁴² *Several Daikundi media outlets cease to exist*, article prepared by Pahjwok, 2015: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2015/03/10/several-daikundi-media-outlets-cease-exist>

3.2. RURAL RADIO LISTENERSHIP

3.2.1. AUDIENCE CHARACTERISTICS

Case study interviews suggested shifts within the rural radio audience over the course of the last decade. Older men used to make up the lion's share of the radio audience. However, with the proliferation of local FM stations, easy and private access using mobile phones, and a variety of programs including a generous number dedicated to entertainment and music, the radio audience has become more diverse, and young people are now considered to be the most avid radio users within rural communities. There is a trend among young men to listen to the radio when travelling to work, largely on their mobile phones. For example, young male focus group discussion participants shared: *"When I am free I listen to music and entertainment programs on my mobile."*

This is not to say, however, that the older generation no longer listens to radio. A community elder from Panjshir relays that *"For older people, listening to the radio is a habit. Most shopkeepers have the radio on non-stop."* Another adds that *"the radio is generally kept on. Elders do not focus on it but it plays in the background."*

A divide, accordingly, is apparent between the older and younger generation both in regard to the way in which they listen to radio (actively or passively) and the type of content that they prefer. The older generation tend to tune in out of habit and have the radio playing in the background. They accordingly are less likely to switch it on to listen to a particular show.

Younger people, by contrast, use their mobile phones to privately listen to the radio, and tune in for specific programs, mostly music or entertainment. Says the same community elder from Panjshir: *"While elderly people listen to the news, young people listen a lot more to entertainment programs."*

Beyond youth, radio usage has generally become more of a private affair. *"People used to listen together in front of houses, but people are busy now and do not do this. People do not come together to listen because they now have access to radio individually and prefer to listen to it by themselves."*⁴³

This change is facilitated, at least in part, by FM receivers built into mobile phones and rising rates of mobile phone ownership. *"Everyone has headphones in from their mobile and listens to the radio."*⁴⁴ This trend was notable across provinces but does not preclude communal radio experiences, especially by older people. In the Bazarak district of Panjshir, for example, *"people talk about programs afterwards by the river, or in the gardens, or in the houses where we meet from time to time."*⁴⁵ Such behavior also shows a tendency among radio listeners to verify information with other community members.

Women were also described, among the wider radio audience, as having increased their radio usage, as the portability of radio devices allows them to move about the house while continuously listening to the radio. *"Radio is easily movable and women listen when they are busy in the kitchen or doing housework."*⁴⁶ While men and women were roughly equally represented in the audience survey sample, the data did not bear out that one group listened more to radio than the other.⁴⁷

⁴³ Community Elder (Male) in Badakhshan, October 2016

⁴⁴ Advertiser (Male) in Khost, November 2016

⁴⁵ Community Elder (Male) in Panjshir, October 2016

⁴⁶ FGD participant (Male, Listener) in Jawzjan, October 2016

⁴⁷ 603 of the 808 respondents said to listen to radio. Of those, 298 were women and 305 were men.

With the proliferation of local stations in certain rural areas of Afghanistan, rural radio listeners have become more demanding. *“Everyone wants to know everything, that is why people are not satisfied with one station and think they might get more information from another radio station.”*⁴⁸ Switching between stations frequently and comparing information from different stations shows that brand loyalty is an increasingly fragile good within a savvier and more competitive rural radio environment.

In regard to when radio is listened to by rural communities, the audience survey indicated that evenings were most popular with 46% of respondents stating this as their preferred time for listening to the radio. For almost a third of those surveyed (32%), the mornings were more preferable. 22% singled out the afternoon.⁴⁹ Preferred listening times, however, differed greatly between provinces. On one end of the spectrum, 93% of radio listeners in the Jaghuri district of Ghazni preferred to listen in the mornings.⁵⁰ On the other end of the spectrum, all (100%) of radio consumers in the Nili district of Daikundi listened in the evenings.⁵¹

“Everyone wants to know everything, that is why people are not satisfied with one station and think they might get more information from another radio station”

-Community Elder in Badakhshan

CONCLUSION

Radio usage in rural Afghanistan has diversified both in terms of the groups within society that listen to radio, as well as the times that radio is listened to and the manner in which it listened to (privately or communally). This development is driven by the increased availability of radio FM radio stations, as well as inexpensive tools to listen to radio, that in the case of mobile phones are also minimally invasive. Catering to different segments of society in different ways, radio can, therefore, reach a cross-section of rural communities, including men and women, elderly and young people.

3.2.2. AUDIENCE PREFERENCES

Simple availability, of course, is not enough to explain media usage. It is also necessary to understand the factors that drive radio consumption by rural audiences among available options. What factors do people list when motivating their choice to listen to the radio, and to one radio station in particular? Greater understanding of the motivations of the rural radio audience sheds light on qualities that local radio should focus on developing.

Radio consumption can be driven by both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. The first, often external, push the audience toward a station, for example because it is the only media accessible within a certain area. Pull factors, conversely, are more likely to be internal to radio, or a particular radio station, and draw in audience members. Pull and push factors can be applied both to general radio consumption in relationship to other media, as well as preference for one radio station among many.

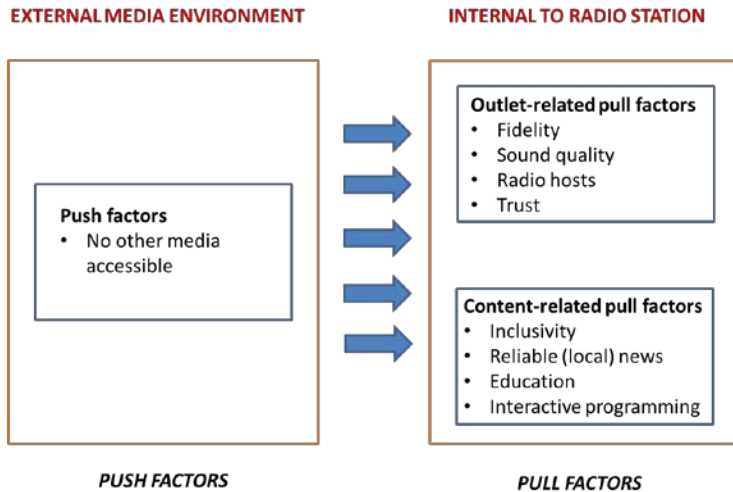
Some stations among the case study sample were the only media outlets within their coverage area. Given this push factor, Radio Khorasan in Panjshir and Radio Darman in Jawzjan have a natural audience. In environments, however, where multiple media outlets are equally accessible, the audience’s choice of one particular station relies not on push factors as much as it does on pull factors. These can be twofold, relating both to the outlet itself and the content that is broadcast. As one community elder from Khost said: *“some people tune into a specific station to listen to their favorite programs, whilst other people like the employees of a station and that is why they listen to it.”*

⁴⁸ Community Elder (Male) in Badakhshan, October 2016

⁴⁹ Consumption patterns were disaggregated for gender but differences in the responses from men and women were negligible. The cause for this might lie in the suggestion that respondents do not answer as individuals but on behalf of their household.

⁵⁰ Note, however, that Radio Jaghuri stops broadcasting at 8pm every evening.

⁵¹ Preferred times for radio usage differed greatly between provinces. Other districts where the evenings proved more popular include Badakhshan (65%), Jawzjan (49%), Khost (46%). In addition to Ghazni, mornings were preferred in Ghor (47%), and Panjshir (45%). A fairly balanced distribution across mornings, afternoons, and evenings was encountered in Paktika and Kunduz.



The first section considers the various outlet-related pull factors that draw listeners to a particular station in more competitive rural radio environments. The second section, focuses on content-related pull factors.

OUTLET-RELATED PULL FACTORS

Media users interviewed named a number of factors as being important in attracting their listenership, including station fidelity, the sound quality of the broadcast (and consistency and strength of the signal), the individual radio hosts

and their levels of professionalism, and the trustworthiness of the radio station.

STATION FIDELITY

Among community members interviewed who were listeners of the community stations, a sense of loyalty to the station prevailed. Listeners lovingly referred to their local radio stations by pet names: “our Aqcha” for Radio Darman in Jawzjan, “Radio Reja,” for Radio Daikundi, after a famous local physician who worked for the station in its early days, or “Radio Delha” (Radio Heart) for Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor. Such loyalty stemmed from a sense of communal ownership. “I listen to Radio Darman [Aqcha, Jawzjan] because it is our own local radio and to support it at least we must listen to it.”⁵²

In addition, because these stations were the first among the local radio stations within their area, their rank was considered valuable: stations and communities had grown together through the post-Taliban years. This sense of loyalty fed into a dynamic of habitual listening. When the radio was switched on, it was unquestioningly tuned to the community station.

SOUND QUALITY

In environments where the only other available media outlets were the BBC and Radio Azadi (for example, in Panjshir and Jawzjan), both broadcast on AM, the superior sound quality of the local FM radio station was universally praised. AM broadcasts suffer from atmospheric interference that affect the quality of reception. Focus group discussion participants, for example, stated of Radio Kishim that “its quality of sound is better than that of radio available on AM.” And asked what makes for good radio, a community elder in Ghor stated “having a good quality of sound.”

RADIO HOSTS

In multiple instances radio presenters were referred to as ‘local idols’. “I like the presenters of Radio Darman a lot,” said a Community Elder in Jawzjan, “because they taught us how to behave with each other, they have become idols for local people on how to have a good personality.”⁵³ Mahsooma Sehrat, a presenter at Radio Daikundi, states that “each staff member has become famous in the

“Most of the listeners are listening to Sada-e Hadalat because it was established as the first local radio station and is well known to everyone. In the second category is Sarhad radio which was established as second local radio and in the third category is Feroz Koh radio which was established last. The audience size is according to the chronological establishment of the radio stations.”

- Community Elder in Ghor

⁵² FGD Participant (Male, Listener) in Ghor, October 2016

⁵³ Community Elder (Male) in Jawzjan, October 2016

cities where this station has coverage.” In her particular case, focus group discussion participants that listened to Radio Daikundi singled Mahsooma out for the sound of her voice and elocution.

Often participants had no trouble reeling off anywhere between 5 to 10 of the names of their favorite presenters but struggled to name the title of their favorite programs. This is indicative of the power an individual radio host can wield, drawing in and binding to himself or herself a dedicated listenership. However, it was also considered important to have a variety of radio hosts as a female non-listener of Radio Kishim stated they stopped listening to the station because *“the same presenters were presenting all the day and I got bored.”*⁵⁴

The level of professionalism displayed by staff on-air was also deemed a factor of great importance in the appraisal of the local radio station by the community. Unprofessional behavior, conversely was presented as a reason not to listen to a station. A community elder from Kunduz said that *“during one entertainment program the presenter was heard whispering and laughing during songs. People objected and presenters were told not to whisper or laugh during songs, or to ask private information from audience members that call in.”* And in regard to Radio Kishim, audience members found that *“its presenters do not have enough knowledge and experience to make or present professional programs.”*⁵⁵

TRUST

Trust in the truthfulness and objectivity of local radio stations was listed as a predominant reason for listening to the station. Radio Daikundi, for example, was said to be ‘unbiased’. Trust in the local radio station stemmed from three principal considerations. Firstly, trust in the outlet followed on from trust in the station’s news reporting. This indicates that a station’s ability to deliver high-quality, timely, unbiased, and detailed news reports help frame the community’s general perception of the entire outlet.

Secondly, the station manager’s personal reputation within the community, as figurehead of the outlet, colors the general trustworthiness of the station. A community elder in Ghor described the station manager as *“a hard working person who has kept the radio alive until now.”*

Finally, neutrality and the absence of political affiliations are keenly perceived by the radio audience, and a major preoccupation. The emergence of media outlets affiliated to a political, ethnic, religious or military group, or to neighboring states, has undermined the audience’s trust in media.⁵⁶ Such affiliations, moreover, are commonly known among the radio audience, and a source of frustration. Where Radio Afghanistan, for example, was available, focus group participants expressed weariness of its governmental affiliation complaining that it *“only broadcasts good things about the government.”* For example, a community elder from Khost believes that *“among the local radio stations, people listen to Radio Sol-e Paigham because it is a neutral radio station, that is why it has the largest audience.”*

Within such an environment, stations dedicated to unbiased reporting shine even brighter. Political neutrality is also linked to the station manager’s reputation. Radio Daikundi’s station manager, for example, has developed a strong reputation for independence, refusing support from Sultan Ali, a former Daikundi Province Governor, because he did not want the station to be compromised.

CONTENT-RELATED PULL FACTORS

While outlet-related pull factors apply to the rural radio audience in general, content-related pull factors concern the types of content broadcast and are more specific to different segments within the radio audience. Content-related pull factors were often expressed by community elders and focus group participants using the umbrella phrase ‘interesting programs’. Thus it is important to understand the factors that contribute to the audience considering a program to be interesting, and for whom these factors apply.

INCLUSIVITY

In ethnically diverse areas such as Kishim (Badakhshan) and Aqcha (Jawzjan), audience members were highly appreciative of shows that reflected the regional culture and emphasized common bonds

⁵⁴ FGD Participant (Female, Non-Listener) in Badakhshan, October 2016

⁵⁵ FGD Participant (Female, Non-Listener) in Badakhshan, October 2016

⁵⁶ *Afghan Media in 2014*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2014

between different groups. A community elder from Kishim argued that *“people living in this community are from different tribes and ethnic groups so the station should motivate unity among the people.”*⁵⁷

Inclusivity also entailed broadcasting in local and understandable languages. In Kishim, again, a female focus group participant explained that *“this is the only radio in Kishim that is broadcasting in local languages. That is why I listen to this radio.”*

Inclusivity also relates to gender-balanced programming and presenting. Female focus group participants preferred to listen to programs that engaged with the family and household issues that inform their daily lives. For example, childrearing, cooking, health, and women’s rights. A program that is particularly popular with female listeners of Radio Sada-ye Hadalat, for example, is called *Ashpazi* (Cooking). It shares recipes and teaches listeners about the nutritional value of different foods. *Zan wa Zindagi* (Woman and Life) is a program aired on Radio Daikundi that is popular with women. A program by the same name is also broadcast by Radio Jaghuri, and the most popular show among female listeners.

Insufficient programs on these topics was a major reason for dissatisfaction with a station, and ultimately a factor that contributed to women no longer listening to a station. When asked if anything was missing from Radio Milma’s programming, female FGD respondents agreed that *“there are no women-related programs.”* For Radio Kishim, the same sentiment prevailed for women: *“I don’t like this radio because it violates the rights of women, it always broadcasts about things that are in favor of men.”* And: *“I don’t like this radio because it broadcasts the voice of men and doesn’t have any women presenters.”*⁵⁸

RELIABLE NEWS AND LOCAL INFORMATION

Reliable news, especially in regard to local happenings, was considered a major pull factor. Male FGD participants in Jawzjan explained their choice of Radio Darman by stating that *“this is the only radio that can deliver local information about our area to us so we can be aware of local news.”* Another chimed in: *“it is the only source of information in our area which is focused on local content therefore it is interesting for me.”* Radio Sol-e Paigham in Khost was praised by focus group participants for *“bringing good information to the community.”* And Radio Kishim was described as *“the only radio broadcasting about issues related to our district, and it is interesting for me to know what is happening in my district.”* As previously mentioned, reliable and useful news broadcasts reflect also upon the overall perception of the outlet by the audience, and can help to create an aura of trustworthiness.

EDUCATION

Lastly, across programming, audience members cited educational content as key to their preferences. This extends from niche learning opportunities on subjects such as agriculture, health, governance, and religion, to more general personal behavioral challenges and exposure to educational facts. With limited formal learning opportunities for many across rural Afghanistan, especially for women, radio clearly is attractive as a source of education.

Conversely, criticism in regard to content centered on programs being ‘uninteresting’ or ‘boring’ either because they were repeated too frequently (*“the station was broadcasting a program repeatedly on different days so it made me stop listening to this radio”*) or because they do not contain sufficient educational content on topics such as religion, health, and childrearing: Radio Kishim’s *“programs are not interesting because they do not bring innovation in their programs so I stopped listening to this radio.”*⁵⁹

INTERACTIVE PROGRAMMING

In addition to the ‘interesting’/‘uninteresting’ criterion, two other factors influenced the audience’s appreciation of a local outlet’s content. The first involved the extent to which listeners were able to interact with radio hosts as well as the wider audience during programs. This translated into a preference for programs that have an interactive format such as Q&As, roundtables, and songs on request, and invite listeners to call in. Rural radio audience members enjoy a sense of agency. The

⁵⁷ FGD Participant (Female, Listener) in Badakhshan, October 2016

⁵⁸ FGD Participant (Female, Non-Listener) in Badakhshan, October 2016

⁵⁹ FGD Participant (Female, Non-Listener) in Badakhshan, October 2016

second factor concerned the extent to which the audience's feedback resulted in program adjustments being made accordingly. When asked whether Radio Milma in Paktika met the information and entertainment needs of its audience, listeners responded in the affirmative *"because they listen to our requests."*⁶⁰

Local stations especially were subjected to these criteria. Not only was it seen as part of their role as a local community radio station to involve the community and take to heart its suggestions, local radio stations were also seen as better positioned to interact with their audience and make *ad hoc* programming adjustments than national outlets. Community members had the phone numbers of the local stations' hosts and experienced neither psychological or physical barriers reaching out to the station.

Audience members were, accordingly, less forgiving when their local station failed to interact with them or take their feedback seriously and listed both as factors that had alienated listeners. A female focus group discussion participant in Ghazni, for example, stated that she had initially started listening to Radio Jaghuri *"because it is our local radio"* but stopped listening *"because it does not pay attention to our ideas."*⁶¹

CONCLUSION

The balance between outlet- and content-related pull factors shifts and which factors take priority is highly dependent on variable circumstance. Nevertheless, the emphasis on education, interaction, inclusivity, and local information in regard to content, trust, sound quality, and station staff in regard to the outlet itself, are suggestive of the roles that local radio can play in rural communities, and how it can stand out in relation to other accessible media.

3.3. PROGRAMMING

Whereas the previous chapter focused on rural media audiences, the different media available to them, how they use radio, and what their preferences are, this chapter focuses on what local radio offers rural audiences, what the impact of that offering is, and how it could be amplified.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. First, the programming of local radio is examined to establish the extent to which local radio offers a variety of types of content, catering to a variety of rural society's segments. Attention is also paid to internally versus externally produced programming. In the second section, the roles of local radio are examined and in the final section, the impact of local radio is measured.

3.3.1. TYPES AND QUALITY OF CONTENT BROADCAST BY COMMUNITY STATIONS

A variety of content is broadcast by the examined local radio stations, with news at an average of almost a quarter of programming for the case study stations. Entertainment and education (including religion) followed, each making up almost a fifth of total programming.

Most stations' programming consisted of a balanced mix of different types of content with news, entertainment, and educational programs (including religious programming) making up about 60% of total programming overall.

Focus Box: Radio Alina, Nuristan

Radio Alina in Nuristan has different informative and educational programs on a variety of topics including religion.

In *Kali wa Kaliwal* (Village and Villager), a reporter selects a village and meets with the farmers there to collect their problems in regard to agriculture. The reporter then shares these problems with the Directorate of Agriculture and tries to find solutions. These are then broadcast. In this way, the station interacts with local communities and raises their voice to the authorities, provides solutions to problems particular to that community and shares these on a public platform.

⁶⁰ FGD Participant (Male, Listener) in Paktika, December 2016

⁶¹ FGD Participant (Female, Non-Listener) in Ghazni, November 2016

In *Staso Roghteya* (Your Health), doctors are invited to the studio to discuss a topic that station staff thinks will serve the needs of the community. For example, earlier this year, an episode was dedicated to vaccination because the station manager had heard that some parents were not vaccinating their children because they believed it could affect their brain. The station manager then urgently invited doctors to the studio who explained that bad behavior on the part of children is not caused by vaccines but poor child rearing. The station in this program seeks out topics that are of immediate relevance to the community, identifies knowledge gaps, and produces content accordingly, thus working towards changing behaviors as well as the general well-being of the community.

Finally, the entertainment program *Ghazal Shpa* focuses on poetry and allows people to call in and read their own poems, thus providing a form of education that is also empowering of the local community and its talents.

Figure 6: The studio of Radio Alina, Nuristan



Focus Box: Radio Milma, Paktika

Radio Milma in Paktika dedicates programs to a range of specific topics that are of use to the community with the potential to impact daily lives and satisfy information needs. For example, covering the field of technology, the program *Lalona pa erow key* (Ruby Ashes) tells the audience of new technological developments around the world. It is broadcast every Wednesday and Friday evening from 8.30-9pm, and is repeated on Saturday and Sunday from 10-10:30am.

Garday Meiz (Roundtable), broadcast every Thursday at 11am-12pm and repeated on the same day at 9:30-10:30pm, highlights problems within the community whilst working towards solutions by bringing together those wronged and those held responsible for discussion.

In regard to health, in *Naroghy oh Darmalana* (Disease and Cure), broadcast Mondays between 8:30 and 9pm, different diseases are discussed by a local doctor; their cause, cure, and prevention.

Finally, a daily religious program by the name of *Lemar Warnagy* (The Sun's Sparkle), broadcast thrice, in the mornings (6-7am), afternoons (2-2:30pm), and evenings (4:30-6pm), discusses different topics in regard to Islam, for example, women's rights and neighborhood interactions, or how to perform ablutions. A religious scholar hosts this show, and is responsible for choosing the discussion

The same program formats reappeared across the sample stations. For example, programs focused on raising the voice of the people such as Sada-ye Mardom (Jawzjan, Ghor) or Ba Mardom (Panjshir), roundtable discussions on social issues such as Wolas Hindar (Paktika), Islamic Q&A programs such as Tajali (Panjshir), and entertainment programs focusing on local poetry such as Ghazal Shpa (Nuristan) and Ameal (Milma). Whilst there was uniformity among local radio stations in terms of the types of program formats and content they broadcast, each station displayed internal variety. Such a variety of content targets different segments of the community including men and women, young people and the elderly.

Content, in addition, is also broadcast in a variety of languages in order to cater to different ethnic groups within the community, ensuring a broad audience basis. Most stations broadcast in a mix of languages with Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor, Radio Khorasan in Panjshir, and Radio Darman in Jawzjan airing programs in the widest variety of languages.⁶² Most stations presented a mix of Dari and Pashto, with ratios depending on the dominant language spoken in the broadcast area. Whilst in Paktika, 80% of Radio Milma’s programming is in Pashto, and 20% in Dari, for Radio Daikundi, these numbers are reversed with 79% of programming in Dari, 20% in Pashto, and an additional 1% in Uzbek. Whilst the mix of languages caters to different linguistic groups within stations’ coverage areas, at times multilingual programming causes mild aggravation among listeners. In Jawzjan, for example, two female focus group listeners complained about programs in Turkmen because they do not understand the language.⁶³

Station	Province	Internal	External
Milma	Paktika	75%	25%
Daikundi	Daikundi	50%	50%
Jaghuri	Ghazni	25%	75%
Sada-ye Hadalat	Ghor	70%	30%
Darman	Jawzjan	80%	20%
Zohra	Kunduz	50%	50%
Alina	Nuristan	80%	20%
Kishim	Badakhshan	60%	40%
Sol-e Paigham	Khost	95%	5%
Khorasan	Panjshir	75%	25%

EXTERNALLY PRODUCED PROGRAMMING

Externally produced programming as a part of total programming ranged from 75% in Ghazni to 20% in Jawzjan. External programming consisted predominantly of Salam Watandar programs. Other content was provided by Equal Access (Bagche Sim Sim or Sesame Street) as well as UNAMA.

Incorporating Salam Watandar programming allowed stations access to a wider range of programming including national news broadcasts, that is also considered by those interviewed to be of a higher quality. In addition, Salam Watandar is able to broach subjects that are deemed too sensitive for internally produced programs.

In addition to receiving a monthly stipend, Salam Watandar saves stations the cost of producing programs. One issue that surfaced in terms of comprehension of content, however, is that Salam Watandar’s multilingual programming does not always fit local audiences. In Paktika, for example, female focus group participants complained that “some languages [of Salam Watandar broadcasts] are not suitable for the local community, like Uzbeki which is broadcast every evening for 30 minutes.”

CONCLUSION

Local radio stations display uniformity in the *types* of content and program formats that they broadcast. News, entertainment, and education (including religion) make up about 60% of total broadcasts. A variety of program formats, catering to different segments of society and touching upon different subject matters as well as broadcast in multiple languages allows for an inclusive offering. External content, produced predominantly by Salam Watandar, adds high-quality programming to the station’s internally produced content, relieves the strain on often already stretched production

⁶² Sada-ye Hadalat and Radio Khorasan in Panjshir both broadcast 60% in Dari, 30% in Pashto, 5% in Uzbek, and 5% in English, and Radio Darman broadcasts 60% in Dari, 20% in Uzbek, 15% in Turkmen, and 5% in Pashto.

⁶³ FGD Participant (Female, Listener) in Jawzjan, October 2016

resources, and provides stations with additional income. Reliance upon external programming differed with most stations producing at least half of their broadcasts themselves.

3.4. ROLE OF COMMUNITY STATIONS

Altai's 2005 report on the emerging Afghan media landscape described a four-pronged role for radio as a source of accurate and reliable information, a source of entertainment, a source of education, and a means to hold those with power accountable.⁶⁴ These roles were mentioned by station managers in interviews, but managers distinguished additional roles for local radio as well: as a voice of civil society, and a public platform for discussion and resolution. There was remarkable uniformity in the turn of phrases used to express these various roles. As a voice of civil society, managers, for example, recurrently and independently described their station as "a bridge between the authorities and the public." This section focuses on three roles in particular: local radio as a provider of information, as an educator, and as a watchdog.

PROVIDING INFORMATION

The rural audience's need for information ranged from news (international, national, regional, and local), to practical information about employment opportunities, community meetings, sporting events, the weather, road conditions, Kankor exam dates, and security.⁶⁵

Local radio stations gathered news and information in a variety of ways. International and national news was sourced from the websites of national radio stations such as BBC Persian and Radio Azadi as well as social media (predominantly Facebook). Gathering news in such a manner requires minimal human resources but is reliant upon a consistent internet connection and electricity supply. Salam Watandar's news broadcasts during the hours of 7-9AM and 6-9PM, aired by all of the stations, served as an additional source of information.

Local news was collected in four primary ways: through informant networks, social media, from local authorities, and field reporting. Firstly, stations relied on networks of relatives, friends, CSOs, and individual audience members to inform staff of local incidents and developments via phone or social media. All of the case study stations had a Facebook page on which informants could leave information. Social media, in addition, was used more widely by staff in order to source local content, including not only Facebook but also Twitter and Instagram.

Where possible, local news thus gathered was always cross-checked with the relevant local authorities or public bodies in personal meetings or via phone. Representatives of these institutions constituted a third source of local news information.

Lastly, station reporters went out into the field to cover news events. Both male and female staff (in stations that employed both) would go out into the field although additional security measures at times had to be implemented for female reporting staff. This type of reporting, however, was considered most challenging: station staff complained of faulty equipment and used their personal mobile phones to record interviews and take photographs instead. In addition, more serious obstacles such as insecurity, absent means of transportation and poor roads inhibited reporters from capturing news in insecure and/or remote regions within their broadcast areas. In these instances, the station had no other choice but to rely on its network of informants and the internet. The result were "estimated reports," in the words of a staff member from Radio Sada-ye Hadalat. News coverage in stations' broadcast areas, accordingly, was often incomplete and uneven.

Finally, local radio stations provide information deemed useful by audience members through advertising. Local advertisements inform the community of the products and services on offer. A community elder in Kishim, for example, states that through advertising "we get to know about the different products available and accessible to us in Kishim and where to find them."

⁶⁴ *Afghan Media: Three Years After*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2005

⁶⁵ The Kankor exam is Afghanistan's college entrance exam.



Radio Sada-ye Hadalat, Ghor

PROVIDING EDUCATION

Stations fulfil their role as community educators by providing a variety of programs on subjects ranging across agriculture, health, religion, local culture, and governance.

The aim of providing education was often to drive social change, build the capacity of the community, and raise awareness of social issues such as women's rights.

Interactive programs such as roundtables, Q&A programs, and quizzes lent themselves particularly well to education, and these were replicated across local radio stations.

Stations source educational content in a number of ways. Firstly, the internet is relied upon. For example, Radio Milma, for its program *Lalona pa erow key* (Ruby Ashes) which discusses new technologies that are being introduced worldwide, searches Pashto language websites dedicated to technological advances. Secondly, stations rely upon the expertise of local community members. Religious scholars are invited to host Q&A programs on Islam, with episodes dedicated to topics such as women's rights within Islam. One of Radio Khorasan's most popular programs, *Tajali*, is hosted by the manager of a local madrassah, Abdul Kabir.

Stations also make use of schools and school teachers, for example, the station manager of Radio Kishim in Badakhshan often goes to a local school to see what the knowledge gaps and needs of local students are. Thus, said one FGD participant, "the owner of Radio Kishim, Noor Agha, comes to our school and takes ideas from the students for his programs." Making use of local figures of authority, known and respected by the community, can help drive the educational message home as there is likely to be a pre-established sentiment of trust crucial to knowledge transmission. Thirdly, local stations buy books in order to get content. Radio Jaghuri, for example, recently bought two books, one on Islam and one on cooking.

Finally, most stations air externally-produced educational programs. Equal Access' *Bagche Sim Sim* (Sesame street), for example, was broadcast by 3 out of the 10 case study stations. Local stations also use these external programs as inspiration for their own educational programs. For example, Salam Watandar's *Fix It*, was a format that Radio Alina in Nuristan has plans to copy.

Educational content covered a variety of subject matters. In the field of agriculture, for example, Radio Khorasan dedicated a program to natural disaster management because "people did not know how to save their orchards from natural disasters." Health was also a popular subject matter among focus group respondents, and programs were dedicated to the correct way to clean teeth, for example. Women's rights were an important educational topic for female listeners, and most stations in the sample dedicated time to the topic as part of educational Islamic programs.

Radio Alina in Nuristan broadcast a program by the name of Mirmano Hoquq about women's rights. Upon recommendation of the community, station staff asks women what kind of information they require. Subsequently, a scholar is invited to the program to provide answers to all the questions posed by women on the subject matter at hand. The program "broadcasts all the information women need in their lives," according to the station manager and has encouraged "the people to send their daughters to school."

ACCOUNTABILITY/VOICE CIVIL SOCIETY/PUBLIC DISCUSSION PLATFORM

Local radio stations serve as watchdogs of local power. They perform this role through investigative journalism, bringing to light malpractices such as abuse of detainees in police custody (Radio Daikundi) in special reports and organizing roundtables with government and community representatives that allow the audience to call in and ask questions directly, thus providing them with a public platform to voice their concerns.

Radio Khorasan, for example, aired a program called *Ba Mardom* (With the People). The program focuses on the issues people have in the community, and the radio publicly voices them and reaches out to authorities on behalf of the community in order to find answers and solutions. Many stations had similar programs, sometimes called *Sada-ye Mardom* (Voice of the People) instead. This was the case, for example, for Radio Darman and Radio Kishim.

Such interactive programs bridge the gap between those in power and the local communities, and work towards direct solutions to issues. In Ghor, for example, years ago, community members were weary of the presence of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and protested, adding only to the political and social instability facing the province. The station invited representatives of the PRT and community, both those in favor and against PRT presence, as well as police for a roundtable discussion to restore consensus. Passionate discussions ensued on-air but the community representatives, better informed of the PRT's reason for being in the province and its activities, withdrew their criticism.

Figure 7: Female listeners of Radio Sada-ye Hadalat gather to discuss their opinion of the station



The aim of the watchdog role is to clarify governance processes, to empower citizens by making them aware of their rights by law, to build an active and engaged citizenry, and to hold authorities accountable for their actions or lack thereof in order to create a more transparent and democratic local society.

Stations empower community members, help build consensus and resolve conflict by providing public on-air platforms.

CONCLUSION

Local radio's predominant roles are that of information provider, entertainer, educator, and watchdog. Stations provide international, national, and local news as well as information on practical, community-related matters. As an educator, stations make use of interactive program formats that offer listeners engaging learning-experiences. Content is sourced widely with the internet becoming an increasingly important and widely used resource. As a watchdog, local radio bridges the gap between the community and the authorities by raising the voice of the former and demanding accountability from the latter.

3.5. THE IMPACT OF LOCAL RADIO

The impact of local radio upon rural communities runs parallel to its roles and can therefore be assessed in a threefold manner: in terms of increasing access to information; in terms of increasing community knowledge levels; and in terms of increasing local government accountability, citizen's participation and public debate. Increasing access to information and community knowledge, in turn, can result in changes in social attitudes and behaviors.

INCREASED ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Access to information in rural areas of Afghanistan cannot be equated directly to access to media. In addition to the different categories of radio, television, and internet as well as to a very small extent print media, according to the Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People rural communities source information from mosques (47.5%), community councils (39%), and by calling people using mobile phones (42.1%).⁶⁶ The latter is facilitated by telecommunications networks now covering 90% of Afghanistan's population, and mobile subscribership having grown significantly.

The predominant media accessible in rural areas in addition to local radio – national radio and television – both also provide their audiences with information. National radio stations such as the BBC and Radio Azadi, available to virtually all of Afghanistan via AM shortwave, given their access to vast resources and high levels of professionalism, are even better positioned to provide rural Afghans with reliable and accurate information. However, these stations do not provide highly localized information on news-worthy events that do not rise to national prominence. For example, the BBC is unlikely to report on a road blockage in Panjshir, announce the arrival of a mobile hospital from Doctors of the World in Kishim, or send field reporters to cover a local festival in Aqcha.

The same applies to television. Like national radio it provides information. And on account of the addition of visual imagery to spoken word, can do so in powerful ways. However, given the necessary capital investments that are involved in starting a television channel as well as significant running costs, television is unlikely to become a localized medium in the Afghan context.

In addition, although both the BBC and Radio Azadi as well as most other national media outlets broadcast in multiple languages, they do not broadcast in local dialects or use locally common vocabularies. Audience survey respondents, accordingly, found the BBC most difficult to understand. Local radio stations, conversely, speak directly to the local community in their own language(s).

The impact of local radio in terms of increasing access to information should be seen predominantly in a local light. Local radio complements existing, high-quality national news coverage with local news and information.⁶⁷ Local radio stations, in addition, are capable of 'translating' national news to the local level, considering the impact of seemingly far-off events on community life.⁶⁸

Consequently, *"people's level of information has increased a lot and even the most uneducated members of society now have some awareness about how to be a member of society and what is happening in the political world,"* say focus group discussion participants in Jawzjan.

Note that this poses a problem for local radio stations that air proportionally sizeable amounts of

⁶⁶ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by The Asia Foundation, 2016.

⁶⁷ Local radio's significant impact increasing access to information is in line with the findings of The Asia Foundation's *Survey of the Afghan People* (2016), according to which almost 75% of rural population use radio as their primary source of information.

⁶⁸ In addition, AM reception can be poor due to atmospheric interference. In such situations, local radio also becomes a predominant source of national news and information.

national programming, be it from Salam Watandar, or another content producer. 75% of Radio Jaghuri's (Ghazni) 10-hour daily programming is made up of Salam Watandar programs targeting a national audience. Radio Jaghuri was also the one station among the sample that was chastised by interviewees for "not paying attention to the people's problem or the audience's input."⁶⁹

Other sources of information such as mosques and village councils, however, also provide local information. Their reach, however, is less extensive than that of local radio, and they have fewer information resources at their disposal, not least because providing information is not their primary role. In addition, local radio is seen to be more reliable than these informal sources of information. In Daikundi, for example, the local mosque relies on the prayer times being broadcast by the local radio station.

Prayer times are announced by Radio Daikundi because an elderly man once walked into the station to find out the exact times, trusting no other source. Since then, the manager has made sure the times for prayers are announced. A staff member relays that when the time for prayer was skipped one day, the studio received a call some minutes after it was due from the mullah of the Saraba mosque asking why it had not been announced. The community clearly counts on the announcements and prays accordingly.



Radio Daikundi, Daikundi

Finally, increased access to local information is not a question of either/or: stations rely on mosques, councils, and community members to inform them of local events and incidents while information gathered from local radio by community members is often cross-checked with other informal sources of information.

Recommendation: What can local radio do to amplify its impact in terms of increasing access to information?

In order to provide information, local radio itself is reliant upon a number of sources of information, among which are local authorities. Increased cooperation from local government in terms of providing access to information and verifying information, while maintaining independence, will allow local radio to provide more accurate reports more efficiently.

Local radio stations would do well to nurture ties with the community, informal informant networks, and more formal networks with civil society organizations in order to expand their news coverage into areas that are very remote or less accessible because of insecurity.

Finally, professional staff, skilled in reporting, editing, and analysis will not only be able to cover more news, but to cover it in a more interesting way, providing analysis and considering the impacts of

⁶⁹ FGD participant (Male, Non-listener), in Ghazni, November 2016.

national or international events upon community life. The dissemination of news in an engaging way is also dependent on professional ways of presenting.

INCREASED COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE

Local radio's educational programs aim to raise the knowledge levels of local communities. Educational programs are also provided by the other two predominant media accessible in rural environments, national radio and television. The program, broadcast by the BBC and local rebroadcasting partners, Khan-e Naw, Zendagi Naw is famous across Afghanistan. Through serialized drama, it tackles societal issues, and is estimated to reach 39% of adult Afghans daily.⁷⁰

Focus group participants have also commented that they learn more now from watching television than listening to radio. Certainly, this could be the case in regard to some educational subject matters. Compared to national radio and television, however, local radio is supremely positioned to target the knowledge gaps particular to the communities in its broadcast areas, and accordingly is likely to be more effective. Referencing events and localities familiar to its audience, and drawing upon the authority of well-known and respected community members. Local radio *"is like a remote teacher to the community, going directly inside every home."*

Local radio can, thus, focus on very practical and immediate learning experiences. For example, in Panjshir, Radio Khorasan dedicated an episode of its Islamic learning program Tajali to the tourists that visit the valley, "how they should be treated, and about the issues that they create, for example by throwing their children's' diapers in the river, or not keeping places clean," says the host of the program, a local religious scholar.

"The program invites listeners to call to the studio, to pose questions directly to the mullah. For certain subject-matters additional community members and scholars are invited, whom are trusted by the community."

In addition, local radio provides a much more interactive learning experience than national radio or television ever can. Most of the educational programs broadcast by the sample stations have Q&A or roundtable formats. This means listeners not only can but are encouraged to call the studio, to ask their question on the subject-matter at hand directly to the expert or panel of experts present in the studio. Community members, thus, receive direct answers to the issues most relevant to them. While these experts are often local authorities such as community elders, teachers, or religious scholars who can also be approached directly off-air, the radio format provides a degree of anonymity that encourages community members to ask questions on topics that might be considered sensitive to discuss in person.

The impact of local radio in terms of increasing community knowledge levels, accordingly, must be seen in terms of the precision with which it can target specific knowledge gaps within the communities in its broadcast area, and can offer listeners an interactive learning experience that ensures that the subjects discussed are highly relevant to their audience.

CHANGE IN SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Increased levels of information and knowledge brought about by local radio can lead to changes in social attitudes and behaviors.

Examples from the research abound. For example, high dowries were prevalent across Paktika, crippling families' financial resources. Consequently, Radio Milma decided to dedicate an episode of its program *Wolas Hindara* (The People's Mirror) to this phenomenon. It invited religious scholars for a roundtable and throughout the discussion it became clear that this time-worn tradition had no basis in Islam. Upon hearing the broadcast, elders in the Surobi district of the province gathered and determined that the practice would be reduced within their communities.

Radio stations such as Radio Daikundi and Radio Sada-ye Hadalat testified that on account of their programs on women's right in Islam and girls' education, parents are now sending their daughters to school. Two FGD participants from Aqcha with plans to migrate to Turkey and Iran relayed how they

⁷⁰ The BBC: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where-we-work/asia/afghanistan/aepo>

changed their mind after hearing how poorly refugees were treated in these countries, and the risks that the journey involved. “I wanted to go to Iran but learnt about hardships and changed my decision,” said one. “I wanted to go to Turkey but heard about the refugee situation and changed my mind,” said the other.

Because local radio through its provision of information and educational programs can target attitudes and societal issues that are distinct to a region, it is likely to be more effective in changing social attitudes and behaviors. Instead of tackling the treatment of women, it zooms in on the treatment of women in Jawzjan, referencing incidents and localities known to its audience, and drawing upon already-trusted local figures of authority.

Recommendation: How can local radio amplify its impact in terms of educating the community and effecting social change?

- In order to tailor educational programs to the knowledge gaps and issues plaguing local communities, stations would do well to gather as much audience feedback as possible given their resources.
 - Increasing interaction with the community off-air but also on-air allows stations to heighten the relevance of their programming and provides listeners with interactive ways of learning.
 - Stations should continue to draw on the trust vested in local figures of authority to empower their messaging.
 - When engaging with topics relating to the lives of women, it is crucial for stations to include women’s voices in their broadcasting. As a female focus group participant from Kishim said: “if the radio station would broadcast the voice of women it could have more effect on community” (for the importance of including women’s voices in programming).
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INCREASED GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

National media, be it radio or television, given its target audience does not focus on holding local governments or powerbrokers accountable. The other type of organization in addition to local radio that performs the role of local watchdog are civil society organizations. Civil society organizations, however, do not have the same public platform as local radio. In fact, many CSOs rely upon local radio to be their mouthpiece, thus engendering synergies.

The impact of local radio in terms of increasing government accountability, accordingly, should primarily be seen again in light of its local focus, as well as its ability to join hands with other local organizations such as CSOs to create synergies. Stations help empower citizens to speak up, providing them with a public platform to do so, and increase transparency in governance processes.

Radio Daikundi covers topics such as the torturing of detainees by the police, the government’s failings when it comes to disaster response and ensuring security within the province. The station creatively uses irony and parody to deal with such politically sensitive subjects. When recently a person was beaten by police forces, the station broadcast a parody report on the incident.

The station’s role as watchdog is not limited to the government only. A staff member, for example, broadcast a report about a local medical organization that was deemed substandard. The organization appreciated the staff member’s observations, and has vowed to make improvements. Radio Daikundi links its role as watchdog with that of the voice of civil society. The station gives “people the chance to raise their voice and to communicate their concerns to the government,” says the station manager. A community elder agrees: “people are voicing their concerns through Radio Daikundi to complain to the government.”

The impact of local radio as watchdog, however, is limited: with gaps in the rule of law and rampant impunity, stations risk severe retributions from the powerbrokers they are trying to hold accountable. Stations, accordingly, avoid certain topics. FGD participants, for example, complained about Radio Khorasan not engaging with the subject of proliferation of marijuana cultivation in Panjshir. Likewise, out of a concern for his personal safety, a staff member interviewed at one station will not cover the construction of a nearby road that is rife with corruption. Because he travels along this road every day, he fears personal retribution should he expose what is going on.

On the flipside, however, because of the risks involved, stations stand to gain significant support from the community, standing strong in the face of power. Their efficacy holding those in power accountable reinforces stations' reputation for neutrality and political independence.

Recommendation: How can local radio amplify its impact in terms of holding those in power accountable, and bridging the gap between the community and the authorities?

- Knowledge is power. Station staff members draw upon their knowledge of the legal framework to demand information, to point local authorities to their responsibilities and citizens to their rights. For example, a staff member from Radio Sada-ye Hadalat considers knowledge of the legal framework to be an asset: "knowledge of the Media Law helps us do our work. We know to be in touch with which government organ when, and to make sure we have the approval of the relevant official before we air any information thus obtained." And Mahsooma, of Radio Daikundi states that "by referring to this law I get information from governmental organs, they have to provide me with information in light of the Access to Information Law.... If they are refusing or denying me information, I explain the law to them in order to further my work." The legal framework includes constitutional rights such as freedom of speech, the right to print or publish topics without prior submission to the state (Article 34), international conventions such as the universal declaration of human rights (Article 7), and the ban on promotion of values contrary to the beliefs and provisions of Islam (Article 3) as well as the Mass Media Law (2016), and the Access to Information Law (2014).
 - Stations already collaborate with civil society organizations as watchdogs of local powerbrokers. To protect themselves, however, and to amplify their voice, stations would do well to extend their networks across not only civil society but media associations and other professional networks. There is both power and anonymity in numbers.
 - Finally, Afghan authorities, the international community, and civil society should continue to press for the implementation of laws protecting both the media sector and media workers and fight impunity. With the law on their side, local radio stations are likely to feel more empowered to stand up to powerful individuals.
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CONCLUSION

The impact of local radio runs parallel to its roles as information provider, educator, and watchdog. Local radio stands out for its ability to pinpoint specific needs within the communities it serves in respect to information and education gaps as well as public grievances, and to address these accordingly. Local radio's impact, therefore, is highly localized and consequently tailored and effective.

4. SUSTAINABILITY OF RURAL RADIO

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Local radio stations serve a sizeable audience and are likely to continue doing so in the future. Their ability to do so rests on the niche role that they play within the community that is geared towards providing local and highly relevant information tailored to the community.
- The extent to which local radio stations will be able to perform this role well and retain their audience relies on their financial resources, their technical and organizational capacities, and their political independence and cultural support.
- A lack of financial resources and high energy costs, lacking technical expertise human resource capacities due to overreliance upon volunteers form the most significant challenges in this respect.

The priority for Internews from the beginning was to build self-sufficiency and sustainability into the community radio network. This chapter considers the prospects of sustainability for local radio stations by zooming in on four pillars: financial, organizational, political and cultural, and audience sustainability. Answers are sought, accordingly to the following four questions.

Are local radio stations financially sustainable? Stations need to be able to cover the cost of their activities, and ideally enjoy a profit margin that allows for innovation in order to be financially sustainable. The following factors are considered: firstly, the main costs of local radio stations and consideration of which of these costs could be reduced. Secondly, local radio's sources of revenues, the extent to which these are diversified, and those that are currently not exploited. Advertising is considered separately as a third factor given the emphasis it has been given in the Internews business model. Finally, attempts to build revenues through business development.

Are local radio stations sustainable from an organizational perspective? Do they have access to the human and non-human resources necessary to successfully sustain their activities? The answer to this question revolves around three key factors: the qualities of stations' management, the professionalism and capacities of staff members, and the resources available to a station.

Are local radio stations politically and culturally sustainable? Is local radio politically enabled, unbiased in its broadcasting, and does it enjoy the support of the community? The ability of local radio stations to remain politically and culturally sustainable is assessed in reference to three primary factors. First the effects of insecurity upon local radio, and measurements taken to minimize the risks associated with insecurity. Second, stations' ability to balance political neutrality with political goodwill. Finally, the ability of stations to balance community support and sensitivities with their aim of driving social change.

How sustainable are local radio stations in terms of their audience? Do stations have a sizeable audience and can they meet the needs and expectations of this audience? The ability of local radio stations to retain their audience in the face of increasing competition rests on three factors. First, the station's ability to cater to the needs of the communities in its broadcast area. Second, the station's ability to be inclusive and representative of the communities in its broadcast area. Finally, the station's ability to carve out a niche role for itself in order to minimize functional overlap with other media accessible in its broadcast area.

For each of these four questions, the conditions that are necessary for radio stations to become more sustainable are also considered.

4.1. DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. New realities are constantly surfacing, forcing local radio stations to adapt if they are to remain operative. Donor funding is decreasing, the economy is experiencing a downturn, and the security situation is deteriorating with increased attacks on

journalists.⁷¹ In addition, the media landscape is changing on account of technical advances such as the transition from analogue to digital transmission, the availability of relatively inexpensive (sometimes solar-powered) televisions imported from China and India, the rapid rise of the internet as well as mobile phone usage, the increase in domestic and international media outlets, consequent competition, and a more sophisticated and demanding audience. How likely are local radio stations to thrive within the parameters set by these developments?

The overall definition of sustainability of local radio stations employed in this study rests on four pillars.

- 1) Financial sustainability: at a minimum, radio stations need to be able to support their activities, and ideally enjoy some surplus for innovation.
- 2) Organizational sustainability: radio stations need to have access to a level of professionalism and resources that allow it to produce and present programs of reasonable quality.
- 3) Political and cultural sustainability: radio stations need to be politically enabled to perform their activities, and to do so in safety, and have to enjoy the support of the communities within their broadcast area.
- 4) Audience sustainability: radio stations need to be able to reach a sizeable audience, and to meet its information needs and expectations.

While each of these pillars impact the overall sustainability of local radio stations in Afghanistan, the first three bear a subsidiary relationship to the last which can be considered most fundamental. Financial, technical, and cultural and political sustainability all contribute to the radio station being able to reach a sizeable audience with relevant programming. Conversely, if a station has no audience, it has no need for financial means, technical competence, or political and cultural support.

SUSTAINABILITY AND THE WIDER ENVIRONMENT

Many of the factors that are threatening stations' sustainability are part of the wider political, economic, and security environment of Afghanistan and do not lie within the immediate sphere of influence of station managers and staff, or their champions among the donor and NGO communities. The economic downturn, for example, has brought about a risk-averse attitude among businesses, impeding further investments, including in advertising. This downturn, furthermore, was considered to be intimately linked with the current political climate, specifically the public perception of political paralysis marking the National Unity Government. Businesses, as a rule, dislike uncertainty. Similarly, security or a lack thereof across the country not only discouraged businesses from investing but was also linked to the government's inability to contain insurgent activities.

These factors were consistently mentioned as threatening the sustainability of individual radio stations. Macro factors such as the state of the economy, the government and the security situation set the parameters for the environment that stations find themselves in, and thus lie largely outside of their realm of control. The ability, however, of station managers and staff to adapt to their external environment, to anticipate and prepare for possible threats, to cushion inevitable blows, and to identify and capitalize upon opportunities that changes in the external environment might (inadvertently) bring can significantly alter their prospects for sustainability. Local radio stations' sustainability is then also reflected in the innovative nature and flexibility with which they adapt to such external developments, minimizing the impact of detrimental events whilst identifying and capitalizing on opportunities others might represent.

4.2. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Within an environment of declining donor funding, economic stagnation, and insecurity, local radio stations were not very sustainable financially.
- Stations face two major challenges in this respect: high electricity costs and minimal advertising revenues.

⁷¹ *Freedom in the World*, report prepared by Freedom House, 2015

- Electricity: with no or at best inconsistent access to electricity, stations rely on diesel-fueled generators to meet their energy needs at significant costs.
- The root cause of minimal advertising revenues is twofold: a dwindling economy and the predominantly rural environment in which stations are based.
- As an additional impediment, insecurity has effectively killed off the advertising market in certain regions of the country, for example, in Kunduz.
- Stations need to secure access to reliable and inexpensive sources of electricity to meet their energy needs, for example, solar energy.
- Additional financial support from the international community for the time being is a necessity. For the future, alternative income generating means should be considered that lay responsibility for the financial sustainability of the station with the community, and draw upon its support.

Stations need to be able to cover the cost of their activities, and ideally enjoy a profit margin that allows for innovation and/or expansion in order to be financially sustainable.⁷² Financial sustainability for local radio, however, means more than the ability to sustain activities financially. Financial sustainability allows local radio stations to remain politically independent, and to stay true to their mission.⁷³

With the economic downturn plaguing Afghanistan and the related reality that the advertising sector is unlikely to be able to solely sustain domestic and particularly local media, decreasing donor funding for media, and increasing competition among media outlets, the financial sustainability of local radio stands at risk.⁷⁴

This chapter assesses the prospects of financial sustainability for local radio in light of these developments by paying close attention to four key factors. First, costs: what are local radio stations' main costs, and can some be reduced? Secondly, revenues: what are local radio's main sources of revenue, how diversified are these revenues, and what potential revenue sources are not currently exploited? Advertising is considered separately as a third factor given the emphasis it has been given in the Internews business model for local radio stations. Finally, attempts to raise revenues through business development: to what extent are local radio stations seeking out and engaging with opportunities to expand their income and raise their stations' profile?

OVERVIEW

Financial security emerged as a key concern for local radio stations. Only a few have achieved financial sustainability outside of donor funding, predominantly from Salam Watandar: Radio Milma in Paktika and Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor, albeit for two very different reasons. Whilst Radio Milma has a significant monthly income, mainly on account of advertising revenues, Radio Sada-ye Hadalat has kept its costs down, notably by relying exclusively on volunteers. For most stations, however, their monthly costs surpass their revenues. Nevertheless, these stations are managing to keep activities afloat in the immediate term.⁷⁵

Table 4: Station Income (AFA/month)

Highest Surplus			Highest Turnover				
	Revenues	Costs	Surplus/Deficit		Revenues	Costs	Surplus/Deficit
Milma, Paktika	253,000	203,000	50,000	Milma, Paktika	253,000	203,000	50,000

⁷² *What is Community Radio? A Resource Guide*, report prepared by AMARC Africa and Panos Southern Africa, 1998.

⁷³ *Signposting Success: Civil Society in Afghanistan*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2012

⁷⁴ Altai Consulting's 2014 report on the Afghan Media noted a move away from core funding of independent media by donors towards support to media as part of other project categories. In addition, actual changes to donors' financial commitment to media are hard to assess due to lack access information.

⁷⁵ Note that stations have been reticent in fully disclosing their income fearing that international support might diminish. In an all-cash economy, furthermore, actual income is very hard to verify.

Kihsim, Badakhshan	90,000	58,000	32,000	Sol-e Paigham, Khost	250,000	225,000	25,000
Sada-ye Hadalat, Ghor	35,000	8,700	26,300	Zohra, Kunduz	90,000	116,000	-26,000
Sol-e Paigham, Khost	250,000	225,000	25,000	Kishim, Badakhshan	90,000	58,000	32,000
Alina, Nuristan	40,000	35,000	5,000	Darman, Jawzjan	50,000	90,000	-40,000
Jaghuri, Ghazni	31,000	35,000	-4,000	Khorasan, Panjshir	40,000	70,000	-30,000
Zohra, Kunduz	90,000	116,000	-26,000	Daikundi, Daikundi	40,000	77,000	-37,000
Khorasan, Panjshir	40,000	70,000	-30,000	Alina, Nuristan	40,000	35,000	5,000
Daikundi, Daikundi	40,000	77,000	-37,000	Jaghuri, Ghazni	31,000	35,000	-4,000
Darman, Jawzjan	50,000	90,000	-40,000	Sada-ye Hadalat, Ghor	35,000	8,700	26,300

COSTS

Examining the monthly operating costs of local radio stations as well as their capital expenditures gives insight into the most significant cost posts and facilitates identification of expenses that can be reduced. Overall, total monthly expenses for the 10 case study stations covered a wide range: 8,700 AFN (Ghor) to 203,000 AFN (Paktika) per month.

STAFF SALARIES

The expenditure proportionally contributing most to total costs were staff salaries. The sample stations fell into three categories in this regard: those that employ only paid staff, those that employ a mix of paid staff and volunteers, and those that exclusively employ volunteers.

	Salaries	Electricity/fuel for generator	Total costs
Daikundi, Daikundi	40,000	15,000	77,000
Jaghuri, Ghazni	18,000	10,000	35,000
Sada-ye Hadalat, Ghor	0	0	8,700
Darman, Jawzjan	30,000	10,000	90,000
Zohra, Kunduz	65,000	28,000	116,000
Milma, Paktika	100,000	25,000	203,000
Khorasan, Panjshir	40,000	10,000	70,000
Sol-e Paigham, Khost	100,000	50,000	225,000
Kishim, Badakhshan	25,000	8,000	58,000
Alina, Nuristan	0	25,000	35,000

While staff salaries were not substantial, and invariably were considered insufficient by staff members, their aggregated impact upon the total monthly costs was significant with Radio Milma paying as much as 100,000 AFN in salaries per month, more than the total monthly costs of Radio Jaghuri in Ghazni.

The term ‘volunteer’, moreover, proved somewhat ambiguous. In the case of Radio Khorasan, for example, staff members were due a salary but simply had not been paid for the last 6 months because of cash flow shortfalls.

ELECTRICITY

Table 5: Station access to electricity

	Yes	No
Darman, Jawzjan	X	
Kishim, Badakhshan	X	
Zohra, Kunduz	X	
Alina, Nuristan		X
Milma, Paktika		X
Sol-e Paigham, Khost		X
Daikundi, Daikundi		X
Sada-ye Hadalat, Ghor		X
Jaghuri, Ghazni		X
Khorasan, Panjshir		X

“When the station was running on a diesel generator for electricity, I brought fuel on loan from the fuel seller. Because of a lack of money I was not able to pay the loan back, however, at the agreed-upon times. I started to think that without money, the fuel seller will come and take me to the jail, and that the station would close.”

-station manager in Ghor

The expense, however, that was mentioned most frequently as burdensome by station managers and staff was the cost of electricity. Most of the case study stations did not have access to the electricity grid, and those that did only had inconsistent access. Most stations rely on diesel-fueled generators to meet their electricity needs. With the price of diesel at 46 AFN per liter at the time of writing, the cost of electricity could add up to 25,000 AFN per month.

The expenses associated with generating electricity limit the broadcast hours of stations. Radio Daikundi’s station manager stated that *“it is only because of a lack of electricity that we are airing 12 hours per day. If we had solar electricity or another stable form of electricity then we will keep airing for 24 hours per day.”*

Extensive broadcasting hours, in turn, were highlighted by FGD participants as a pull-factor driving their appreciation of a station, and regarded as a measure of a station’s professionalism. The converse was also true as transpired in discussions with listeners and non-listeners of Radio Jaghuri in Ghazni province, which only broadcasts for 10 hours.

Some of the stations within the case study sample had found creative ways to go around this problem. Radio Daikundi, for example, has struck a deal with the mobile operator AWCC that let it use AWCC’s electricity in exchange for advertising. Consequently, the station is able to broadcast 24 hours a day. Such creative solutions, however, are not replicable across the sector.

Installing solar systems to generate electricity would be the most straightforward way of reducing fuel costs. Solar panels and batteries can be purchased across the country, and rural Afghanistan is already accustomed to working with them. It is also a solution that has been identified by all of the station managers interviewed. It, however, requires a capital investment as well as maintenance costs that few stations are able to afford.

With costs already at a bare minimum, to the extent that due salaries are withheld for prolonged periods of time in order to manage cash flows, and station staff using personal phones as recorders, and personal motorcycles for transportation into the field, opportunities for further cost reduction are very limited.

REVENUES

Most stations rely on a mix of advertising revenues and donor funding, the latter including paid programming.

Internews helped establish these stations as commercial entities that could help increase access to information thus promoting democratic processes whilst earning a profit. In its initial selection of station managers and owners, the organization, accordingly, gave priority to those that could make the radio station work as a business.⁷⁶ Stations were encouraged to generate as much income from advertising as possible and were purposefully “starved” of donor funding in order to catalyze financial sustainability.⁷⁷

While advertising provides an important source of income for many stations (notably Kunduz, Panjshir, Jawzjan, and Paktika), many of these stations (all except for Paktika) still run at a monthly deficit, and overemphasizing advertising as a principal means of income generation within the current economic and security environment in Afghanistan would be misplaced. Minimal and diminishing advertising revenues are the major challenge in regard to the sustainable revenue generation of local radio stations.

The root cause of minimal advertising revenues is twofold: a dwindling economy and the predominantly rural areas in which these small-scale stations are based. In regard to the latter, most of the sample stations are based in very rural areas where the local commercial environment is of such a small-scale that the advertising pools are limited and advertising budgets are minimal, or advertising is simply seen as incapable of adding any value in regard to raising brand awareness. In Ghor, the station manager relays that *“the response of companies to our marketing is ‘the city is small, all the people know us already and there is no need for advertising.’”*⁷⁸ Self-generating income is harder to secure in such rural environments than in more urban centers. Because of their limited coverage, local radio stations, moreover, are unlikely to ever pull in large (national) advertising contracts.

Insecurity is an additional impediment on top of the economic downturn that can effectively kill off advertising markets in regions affected. Advertising revenues for Radio Zohra in Kunduz, for example, have fallen by 30% since the city was overrun twice by the Taliban within the span of two years. They cited a flight of capital, businesses shutting down, and a generally risk-averse investment climate as the main culprits.

Local commercial environments in Afghanistan at present cannot sustain local radio stations through advertising, especially in the face of insecurity. Given the current environment, it is impossible that increasing advertising revenues could make up for dwindling donor resources. There is, accordingly, an undeniable need for additional forms of financial support. In the immediate term, this most likely means donor funding. Daikundi, Ghazni, and Ghor already rely predominantly on Salam Watandar’s monthly stipend of 28,000 AFN or 14,000 AFN. *“The support of donors is key,”* says the station manager of Radio Sada-ye Hadalat. *“If their funding stops, most of these radio will no longer be able to function. Currently these local radios are surviving on account of paid programming of Salam Watandar, if this support was not there, the doors of most of local radios doors would be closed.”*

Table 6: Station funding sources

	Adv/PP	Donor/SW	Core
Zohra, Kunduz	83%	17%	
Khorasan, Panjshir	80%	20%	
Kishim, Badakhshan	70%	30%	
Sol-e Paigham, Khost	60%	20%	20%
Darman, Jawzjan	50%	50%	
Milma, Paktika	40%	30%	30%
Daikundi, Daikundi	30%	70%	
Alina, Nuristan	30%	70%	
Jaghuri, Ghazni	10%	90%	
Sada-ye Hadalat, Ghor	7%	93%	

⁷⁶ USAID’s Assistance to the Media Sector in Afghanistan, report prepared by Colin Soloway and Abubaker Saddique, 2005: 15.

⁷⁷ Former Internews director John West quoted in *Afghan Media in 2010*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2010.

⁷⁸ Station Manager, Radio Sada-ye Hadalat, Ghor, October 2016.

Paid programming from donor organizations, however, is diminishing. Sustained information campaigns on the part of the international community whose tools included paid programming and public announcements initially provided local stations with steady income streams.⁷⁹

Between 2006 and 2008 the Panjshir Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), along with several other international organizations, provided Radio Khorasan with paid programming. The station was also able to attract local advertisers. Consequently, station staff grew from five to thirteen members within the span of two years. When the US-led PRT left in 2008, however, the station's revenue streams started to dry up. The mobile operator Roshan also discontinued its advertising with the station. The station cut its staff members to 3 persons and eventually suspended its broadcasting. Radio Khorasan started broadcasting again in 2013 with investments from staff members but "we have not been able to get back to the level that we need to be at," according to the station manager.



Figure 8: Radio Khorasan's studio, Panjshir

In the longer term, a new model of community contributions that at present stands unexplored might have the potential to further diversify funding. Despite high levels of poverty in rural Afghanistan, communities indicated their willingness to support their local radio station more concretely. Focus group respondents that did not already support the local radio station expressed their willingness to do so but stated that they were not aware of the types of support the station was in need of or how they could provide the station with support. Types of support could include donations, fundraising events, membership fees, fees for announcements, fundraising events, and sponsorship.

support and buy-in and is highly dependent on the reputation of the station and its management. It would, however, also empower communities with a sense of agency. The challenge in this regard, then, is to impart upon the community that the ultimate responsibility for the local radio station's sustainability lies with them, not with international donors.⁸⁰

Sourcing funding from the community, however, requires high levels of community

A combination of funding streams is preferable as this facilitates a station's independence, and overreliance upon one source is inadvisable.

Differing reliance upon donor versus advertising funding, as well as differing relationships between revenues and costs among the sample stations, indicate that a one-size fits all funding structure does not exist. Stations should tailor their funding strategies according to their environments, and the possibilities that these present. Radio Milma's reliance upon advertising (40%), for example, does not necessarily pose a problem as the station manager sees the advertising environment improving as the coverage area of the station expands, and businesses increasingly recognize the value of advertising. "Advertising is increasing because we are optimistic about the future because we are trying to have more stations to broadcast into other provinces. In this case we will have a larger audience and can encourage traders and NGOs to advertise with us."

ADVERTISING

Advertising constitutes an important source of revenue for local radio stations, albeit to differing degrees, as was noted above. Local radio stations are privy to two principal advertising revenue streams. On the one hand, as part of the Salam Watandar network, local stations participate in the revenues from advertising contracts between Salam Watandar and national advertisers through a mechanism called 'revenue sharing'. On the other hand, stations individually strike advertising deals with both local and national businesses, CSOs, and national and international NGOs.

⁷⁹ *Afghan Media in 2010*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2010

⁸⁰ *What is Community Radio? A Resource Guide*, report prepared by AMARC Africa and Panos Southern Africa, 1998: 53.

Interviews with local advertisers indicated that the audience coverage of the station was the most important consideration when deciding where to place advertisements, with price the second most important consideration. Pricing was flexible with few stations having fixed rate cards. Radio Milma in Paktika was one of the few sample stations with a fixed price list and stood out in this regard.

Advertising rates were becoming less expensive in the face of persisting economic malaise and increased competition. In regard to the former, the representative of Sofizada, a pharmaceutical company in Kishim explains that “this is not Kabul and the radio needs us, whereas in bigger cities advertisers run behind the media.” Accordingly, the last advertisement aired by the Radio Kishim for Sofizada was priced at a 2,000 AFN discount, from 5,000 to 3,000 AFN per month. In regard to the latter, in Ghor, two other local radio stations are active within the coverage area of Sada-ye Hadalat: Feroz Koh and Radio Sarhad, both established in 2014. This has led to competitive pricing. For example, when UNICEF wanted to air an advertisement, Sada-ye Hadalat bid 100 AFN per minute, Feroz Koh 99 AFN per minute, and Radio Sarhad offered 30 AFN per minute, thus distorting the market.

Whilst a more vibrant media sector will in the longer term aid stations by pushing professionalization and niche specialization, presently, increased competition causes stations to lose out on important revenues.⁸¹

The types of companies that engage directly with local radio in order to place advertisements ranged from telecom giants such as Roshan and MTN, both of which have in the past advertised with Radio Khorasan in Panjshir, to very small, localized businesses such as Mohammad Saleem’s Barber Shop and Sedaqat Restaurant, both of which place advertisements with Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor.



Advertiser in Aqcha, Jawzjan

REVENUE SHARING

Salam Watandar sells advertising and public service announcement slots on its programming. The income thus generated is distributed to its partner stations depending on the estimated audience size of each station as part of their monthly stipend. The Salam Watandar network of local radio stations as an outlet for advertising only appeals to advertisers with a national focus including international telecommunications companies such as Roshan, MTN, AWCC, and Etisalat, and international organizations. Informal interviews with strategic communications companies, however, indicated a weariness on the part of these companies to invest in Afghanistan and a concomitant decline in their advertising budgets, citing an uncertain political climate and ensuing economic downturn as the two

⁸¹ *Afghan Media in 2014*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2014

main contributing factors.⁸² In regard to international organizations, their presence in Afghanistan had dwindled significantly since 2014's security transition.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The ability of local radio stations to explore alternative sources of revenues, as well as maximize existing sources, in order to become more sustainable depends on business development efforts and capacities.

Business development and marketing activities differ vastly between stations, from none by Radio Jaghuri in Ghazni, to a dedicated staff member in Ghor who alongside the station manager actively pursued advertising opportunities by visiting companies in the towns' main bazaars.

For advertisers, advertising on the radio was also an effective and inexpensive way to attract business. For example, the representative of the Sherzai Clinic in Paktika first heard of Radio Milma "because this radio has its own advertisement to encourage the customers along the lines of 'if you want to increase your business, we are here to collaborate with you.'"

Business development efforts, however, were often thwarted by the rural environments in which stations were active and the lack of vibrant commercial sectors therein. Accordingly, in the words of the station manager of Radio Kishim, "the problem is in the mindset, many businesses see advertising as an expense and not as an investment." Advertisers in the same district, however, commented on the general advertising climate changing with "more businesses wanting to advertise with radio because businesses feel incomplete without advertising now."

Whilst radio can convince business of the added value of advertising, its business development efforts are ultimately circumscribed by the capacity of the local economy. Whilst business development trainings such as those led by Internews in 2011 impart important skills to exploit whatever capacity is present, the same capacity is often quickly depleted if the overall economy does not pick up.⁸³

CONCLUSION

More than half of the sampled radio stations had insufficient monthly revenues to cover their costs. Stations faced two major challenges in this respect: high electricity costs and minimal advertising revenues.

With no or at best inconsistent access to electricity, stations rely on diesel-fueled generators to meet their energy needs at significant costs. Minimal advertising revenues are rooted in the dwindling economy and the predominantly rural environment in which stations are based. Regarding the latter: some stations are based in very rural areas where local business is of such a small scale that advertising budgets are minimal or advertising is seen as incapable of adding any value in regard to brand awareness. Due to their local focus, moreover, radio stations are unlikely to ever pull in large advertising contracts. As an additional impediment, insecurity has effectively killed off the advertising market in certain regions of the country, for example, in Kunduz.

In order to become more financially sustainable, stations need to secure access to reliable and inexpensive sources of electricity to meet their energy needs. While some stations have come up with creative solutions to meet their energy needs, these are not replicable across the sector and, therefore, not widely sustainable. Installing solar systems would be the most straightforward solution. Panels and batteries can be purchased across the country, and rural Afghanistan is already accustomed to working with them. Salam Watandar has already provided a number of its network stations with solar systems.

In order to overcome minimal advertising revenues, stations need to draw upon diversified funding sources, including continued international support. In addition, ultimately, the onus for stations' financial sustainability needs to shift from the international community and the individual station to the individual station and the local community.

⁸² *Overview: Afghanistan*, report prepared by the World Bank, 2016. GDP growth slowed to 1.5% in 2015.

⁸³ In 2011 Internews conducted courses in Sales/Marketing with more than 120 people from 56 media outlets of which 21 were radio stations. These training courses of 10-hours were led by Advisor, Steven Comrie, and the Internews Business Development Sales and Marketing Team in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar.

Given the present economic climate, the often very rural location of local radio stations, and high levels of insecurity, local radio stations are not able to sustain themselves financially by generating advertising revenues. Additional financial support from the international community for the time being is a necessity. For the future, alternative income generating means should be considered that lay responsibility for the financial sustainability of the station with the community, and draw upon its support. Despite high levels of poverty in rural Afghanistan, communities indicated their willingness to support their local station more concretely. Whilst such a strategy requires the community's buy-in and is dependent on the reputation of the station and its management, it would also empower communities with a sense of agency.

4.3. ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

KEY TAKEAWAYS

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- One of the reasons stations have been able to stay afloat financially despite diminishing revenues streams is because they rely in part or entirely on volunteers.
 - Whilst volunteers absorb gaps in funding and signify community participation and support for the station, their limited professional capacities and high turnover rate significantly impacts the overall professional and technical capacity of the station.
 - Stations need to find a balance between wanting the community to participate, and to build the human resource capacity of the community, and their own professional capacity and continuity. This includes having clear volunteering policies in place.
 - The high staff turnover rate also means that trainings are capped at the basics of journalism and long-term capacity building programs are absent. Salam Watandar's video tutorials on technical issues go some way in facilitating knowledge transmission.
 - With a part-time and volunteering staff, much of the station's success relies upon the individual of the station manager. The capacities and engagement of station managers varied across the sampled stations.
 - In regard to resources, a lack of electricity is the main factor limiting broadcast hours. Alternative sources of energy, notably solar, warrant exploration.
-

In assessing the organizational capacities and sustainability prospects of local radio both human resources and other resources must be considered. That is the skills and diligence of management and staff, as well as access to equipment, energy, information, and transportation. This chapter is divided into two main sections, accordingly.

Figure 9: The team at Radio Khorasan, Panjshir



HUMAN RESOURCES

Human resources include the capacities of station owners, managers, and staff members.

LEADERSHIP

As with any organization, much of the success of a local radio station depends on the initiative, skillfulness, and savviness of its manager. Adequate leadership, accordingly, is a key factor driving the success of local radio stations. This section examines the abilities of local radio's managers, and how their leadership may contribute to a station's sustainability.

Strong leaders contribute to their station's sustainability in a number of ways: by providing experience, by driving business development, and by cementing community support through outreach activities and a solid personal reputation. In addition, the added value of female leadership in terms of a station's social impact is considered.

Experience

With high observed staff turnover rates, a strong manager can become one of the few elements of continuity crucial to building a station's identity as well as a source of knowledge and experience for newcomers. Whilst a positive, heavy reliance on the station manager also raises questions in regard to how to best ensure a station does not fall apart in his or her absence. Station managers had typically been with the station since inception.

Driving business development

Some station managers stood out on account of their vision and ambitions. The station manager of Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor, for example, has plans to update the current 300 Watt transmitter to a 600 Watt one in order to increase the station's coverage, and is pursuing various donors toward this end.

Radio Milma's manager is ambitious and has been responsible for growing the one-outlet station in Urgun district to a pan-Paktika radio station with outlets in the Center and Kharkoit districts also. Coverage now extends across the whole of Paktika and Paktia provinces as well as certain districts in Wardak and Ghazni. The manager, furthermore, has ambitious plans to open outlets in Paktika's Barman district, Ghazni province and Kabul. "We want to increase our broadcast area so that we can generate more advertisement revenues in the future," says the manager. The manager's ambitions bode well for business development.

However, some of the radio stations' owners and original managers no longer actively work at the station, and have left day-to-day management in the hands of adjunct managers, as they moved to Kabul, or even abroad.

The owner and former manager of Radio Darman in Jawzjan, Noor Agha Sharifi, is no longer acting manager of the station. He is now based in Mazar-e Sharif, where he is a lecturer at the university and the head of Arzo TV since the end of summer 2016. Day-to-day management of the station is left in the hands of his brother Nasir Sharifi. Staff members agree that Radio Darman “does not have strong management at the moment.” By his own admission, the acting manager does not have strong networks with donors, which he realizes are crucial to receive support. Networks had previously been maintained by his brother.

A female focus group participant explains why she initially started listening to Radio Darman: “because it had educational programs at the beginning when Noor Agha was managing it but now it doesn't have anything interesting.”

While a Kabul base facilitates network opportunities on account of proximity to international donors, advertisers, and other media, the physical distance also impedes oversight. With accountability systems poor or entirely absent, a lack of direct oversight gives cause for concern. The distance, in addition, can impart upon the station staff and wider community an air of indifference.

Manager's Reputation

The station manager's personal reputation is of crucial importance to the overall reputation of the radio station, and the community's perception of its trustworthiness.

The personal reputation of the manager was closely tied to his or her political independence. The station manager of Radio Daikundi is renowned for his independence after turning down financial and security support from the former provincial governor of Daikundi. Perceptions of personal neutrality and trustworthiness reflect greatly upon the station as a whole. Trustworthiness, in addition, was identified as a key outlet-related pull factor and listed as a predominant reason for listening to a particular station by FGD participants. The reputation of the station manager was also key in facilitating women's involvement in radio stations.

The relationship between the manager's reputation, furthermore, and community support for the station was found to be a mutually reinforcing one. Taking the effort to build a strong standing with local communities turned managers into well-known figures and positively affected both their reputation and that of the station. Community members were very capable of distinguishing between genuine efforts to build the radio station for the benefit of the community and managers that sought self-enrichment only. A reputable station in turn is much better positioned to garner further community support.

Female leadership

Female leadership of local radio has the potential to amplify the station's social impact by providing the community with a powerful example of what a progressive, educated Afghan woman looks like, thus demonstrating that women's rights do not pose a threat or have to be at odds with Islam. Of the stations among the case study sample, only Radio Zohra in Kunduz and Radio Jaghuri in Ghazni had female management. Both managers, however, are presently not based in their respective districts, but rather in Kabul.

STAFF CAPACITIES

Human resource issues have plagued the independent media sector for years. Studies have found technical skills to be lacking, and journalistic skills to be weak, leading to outlets reporting facts with little analysis – a not particularly engaging form of information dissemination.⁸⁴ This section considers the capabilities of local radio stations' staff members, and the conditions that are necessary for them to become more capable.

⁸⁴ *Signposting Success: Civil Society in Afghanistan*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2012

A lack of professionalism was noted by station management, staff itself, community members and advertisers. Asked to describe the level of professionalism he encountered in his dealings with Radio Jaghuri, one of the advertisers stated that *“they are not professional but they air the advertisement.”* Other advertisers concurred: *“they are not professional, their skill level is very low.”* One of the community elders believes that this is the case because *“they do not receive training, that is why the employees are not professional.”*

	Paid	Volunteer	Total
Daikundi, Daikundi	4	10	14
Jaghuri, Ghazni	2	2	4
Sada-ye Hadalat, Ghor	0	19	19
Darman, Jawzjan	5	10	15
Zohra, Kunduz	0	6	6
Milma, Paktika	9	1	10
Khorasan, Panjshir	0	7	7
Sol-e Paigham, Khost	9	0	0
Alina, Nuristan	0	7	7
Kishim, Badakhshan	7	0	7

Low levels of staff capacity were driven by the following factors: heavy reliance upon volunteers, a lack of rigorous recruitment policies, and insufficient training. Heavy reliance upon volunteers, in turn, resulted in a high staff turnover rate and a consequent lack of continuity and knowledge retention. Each of these factors is discussed below.

Overreliance on (part-time) volunteers

Many stations relied extensively on volunteers or quasi-volunteers (staff that theoretically was due a salary but had not received any due to insufficient cash flows) with few stations able to afford paid staff. Radio Sada-ye Hadalat stood out, relying exclusively on volunteers (all part-time except for the station manager). On the other end of the spectrum, Radio Milma paid all of its employees a salary, one that was comparatively high at 10,000 AFN per month for a presenter, except for one volunteer. This leads to a distinction between stations reliant on volunteers and those with paid staff, a distinction that ties into levels of commercialization, and operating dynamics. Most volunteers worked part-time at the station and were either students, had additional paid part-time jobs, or were seeking full-time/paid employment.

While volunteers alleviate the strain on often meagre budgets, as is clearly the case for Radio Sada-ye Hadalat, the use of volunteers entails more than merely enlisting cheap labor. Having volunteers among station staff can contribute positively to a radio station’s sustainability because it allows for higher levels of community participation. *“Each person can work in the radio, the radio belongs to the people,”* according to a community elder in Ghor. The latter facilitates the community’s buy-in and contributes to the objective, common among stations, of building the human resource capacity of the local community by empowering people, and giving them the skills and professional experiences they need to serve their community better. *“We have trained more than 100 people as journalists,”* said the station manager of Radio Sol-e Paigham proudly. Volunteering on the part of the community, in turn, should be seen as an expression of community support, a key factor contributing to sustainability. It is a notable achievement that stations can motivate up to 19 people (in the case of Radio Sada-ye Hadalat) to work for free.

There are, however, several downsides to volunteerism that negatively impact levels of professionalism, continuity, and knowledge retention, and thus ultimately stations’ sustainability prospects. Firstly, volunteers are less likely to be trained journalism or media professionals and often do not possess the necessary skill-set upon entering employment at the station. A limited skill-set affects the quality of work and means volunteers require extensive training, resources for which are limited.

Secondly, as most volunteers are students or job seekers, they regard working at the station as a temporary step before paid employment, and leave the moment they find a job, or when their additional paid job becomes more demanding. Volunteerism thus leads to a high turnover of staff which in turn feeds into lower levels of professionalism as knowledge transmission dynamics are disrupted. High staff turnover also does not benefit continuity: stations are less able to build a station’s identity as the latter is intimately tied up with presenters or ‘the voice of a radio station’.

Examples of stations that do pay salaries, such as Radio Milma in Paktika, show that the recruitment and retention of full-time staff is a key factor driving success. Radio Milma has the highest monthly income among the case study sample stations, and has grown its coverage area and advertising revenues significantly over the course of its five-year existence.

It should also be noted that a lack of professionalism does not necessarily create a problem. When a station has an otherwise good reputation with the community based on its efforts, trustworthiness, and neutrality, audiences are willing to let lacking professionalism slip, understanding that station staff is doing the best it can given its capacities and resources. When asked whether Radio Darman performs its roles well, a community elder answered: *“this is hard to answer for me, because I know it does not. But on the other hand, I know it is doing its best too but just does not have enough resources.”* And in Ghor a community elder stated: *“The station does not have expert staff, they do not know about reporting professionally, but they are hardworking staff and trying to do their best which is good and accepted by people.”* Conversely, if a station is considered not to be making an effort, it can be chastised for lacking professional staff. This, for example, was the case among focus group participants in discussions about Radio Jaghuri.



Two staff members of Radio Kishim, Badakhshan

Recommendation: How can stations diminish reliance on volunteers, or at least counter high staff turnover?

- Financial resources are key to diminishing reliance upon volunteers, and stations that pay salaries such as Radio Milma note higher rates of staff retention that allow them to focus on long-term capacity building programs that further incentivize staff to stay.
- As most stations had meagre financial resources at their disposal, however, there are other measures that stations could implement outside of paying salaries. Participatory management styles wherein decisions are made in a consultative manner give staff the opportunity to take decisions and ownership of the station’s success which could work as a disincentive for volunteers to leave the station. In addition, women are less likely to be looking for paid jobs outside the community.

Radio Alina, Nuristan: For all the 7 staff members working at the station as volunteers, the station manager has found them paid a paid job in another sector and in exchange for which they work with

The challenge facing stations in regard to volunteerism goes right to the heart of the model for local radio and its mission, that is, stations need to find a way of balancing their goal of capacity building with professionalism, and without distancing those less skilled or alienating community members. Stations would do well, in this respect, to formulate a clear volunteer policy: a contractual program with a schedule and training mechanisms that volunteers participate in, and after which they are either taken on as paid staff or find a job elsewhere with their enhanced skill-set. A database of ex-volunteers can be drawn up to facilitate future recruitment, or to absorb any gaps in funding on an *ad hoc* basis.

A lack of rigorous recruitment policies

All stations had some degree of recruitment policy in place. A typical policy would include the following: an announcement on the radio of the job opening; from the pool of applications, candidates would be selected to sit a written exam and have their on-air voice tested. The selected candidate would often start working as a volunteer for a probationary period of time before being offered paid employment.

Having a recruitment policy in place allows for a measure of quality control. Radio Zohra in Kunduz, for example, has recently raised minimum education qualifications for new staff members from 12th to 14th grade. Rigorous recruitment procedures, however, were often not adhered to mainly because of budget constraints. Whilst capable professionals were present in each of the case study districts, local stations stood no chance of hiring them due to their inability to pay regular salaries or to match the salaries of bigger Afghan or international organizations. Consequently, compromises were made with many staff members being students without the necessary expertise.

The lack of rigorous policies was also visible in practices of nepotism. Perceptions of nepotism, or the favoritism shown to relatives and friends with disregard for the competencies of individuals, tainted the reputations of some stations and gnawed away at good will. Especially as local radio stations are to be community-based, accusations of nepotism meant a station was seen as forsaking its mission, serving not the community but one family.

Lack of training

Given the low capacities of largely volunteer staff upon entering employment at the station, training is all the more important. Because of high staff turnover rates, however, trainings remained basic, with long-term strategic personal development plans not implementable. In addition, the turnover rate impeded knowledge retention, requiring basic training of new staff constantly, and served as a disincentive on the part of managers to invest in trainings. Most stations then provided basic on the job training, and because of a lack of experienced staff, the onus for this often fell on the station manager.

Radio Darman, Jawzjan: following the station's establishment in 2009, its staff members received training by Internews and Nai. Upon completion, station staff expected an increase in their salaries now that their skillset had improved. When the station could not meet their demands, many left and found better jobs with media outlets in Mazar-e Sharif in neighboring Balkh province. Since 2009, 90% of original staff have thus left. The acting manager, consequently, was weary of the risks involved in training, and current employees have, accordingly, not received any formal training outside of on-the-job training. 10 out of the station's 16 employees are volunteers. "Staff give their best but they are not professionals," says the acting manager.

Recommendation: How can trainings be made to last?

- Salam Watandar has taken measures to counter this knowledge gap by providing video tutorials on CDs. Additional measures could include enlisting the community: for example, asking successful business men from the region to do a voluntary training on marketing, or journalists from the region that have moved to Kabul to host a one-day workshop on a particular topic.
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NON-HUMAN RESOURCES

For station management and staff to make the most of their own capacities, they need access to non-human resources, notably equipment, energy, information, and transportation.

EQUIPMENT

Internews supplied its network of stations with transmitters and other essential equipment upon establishment, and later with satellite receivers to receive broadcasting from Salam Watandar. Sources of equipment for local radio today vary with most equipment having been donated by international organizations such as Internews, USAID, or PRTs. In addition, stations have also themselves invested in upgrading equipment. Sada-ye Hadalat, in Ghor, for example, this year has made significant capital investments. A new transmitter (\$2,750), sound mixer (37,000 AFN - \$570), and computer (10,000 AFN - \$155) were purchased, totaling ca. \$3,475 or 225,875 AFN, all paid for by the money that the station has managed to save by keeping its monthly overhead costs at a bare minimum. Other stations have made use of additional donor funding to install new equipment. Following the ransacking of Radio Zohra's studio during the fighting in Kunduz in 2015, for example, GIZ gifted the station a new 300 Watt transmitter. The case of Radio Zohra, however, also highlights the challenges caused by insufficient technical capacities on the part of staff members: the new transmitter broke down, could not be repaired on-site in Kunduz, and has been brought back to Kabul for repairs.

Necessary broadcasting equipment common to all stations includes the transmitter that generates the broadcasting signal, the antenna through which the transmitter's signal is radiated, a satellite receiver, and studio equipment such as a mixing board and computer. Key among these pieces of equipment is the transmitter, as the power and quality of the transmitter a station uses directly affects its broadcast area which in turn circumscribes the potential audience of a radio station, and its pool of advertisers.

Aside from these pieces of equipment without which the station would not be able to broadcast, basic equipment for field reporting was often noted to be lacking. Recorders for example or cameras, as a consequence of which staff members used their own mobile phones to record interviews or to take pictures.

Technical sustainability, in addition, concerns not only having the right equipment but knowing how to use it properly and to its full potential. Stations can maximize the power of their transmitter through considered positioning and maintenance. Station staff, however, had very limited knowledge in this regard and, for example, often only knew the record button on a recorder and none of its other functions.

Salam Watandar offers an important resource in this regard that can help stations make the most of the equipment they possess: video tutorials show how to best install a dipole, the different functions on a recorder, what type of microphone to use in which setting, or how to construct a make-shift windscreen for microphones to minimize sound interference. These video tutorials are recorded on CDs and distributed to the network's partner stations.



Radio Daikundi, Daikundi

INFORMATION

Local radio stations need access to information resources in order to produce informative programs including news broadcasts and roundtables. Local radio stations have traditionally used a range of information resources to meet their own information needs. Stations rely on local experts and authoritative figures who are invited to roundtable or Q&A programs; cookbooks or books on Islam are used for cooking programs and religious programs, respectively; local and national newspapers are consulted for information, and relatives and friends keep station staff posted on happenings in other areas of the country. Stations also need information on how to handle equipment or fix equipment, and on the laws and regulations that affect their work.

The internet is playing an increasingly important role in this regard. A news reporter at Radio Khorasan relays how he starts the day at 8AM, searching the websites of BBC Persian and Radio Azadi for news updates. He collects all the reports, and edits them for broadcast at 9AM. And Abdul Kabir, the mullah in charge of religious programming at the same station also consults the internet to verify certain matters or look up questions posed by listeners that he himself cannot immediately answer. Similarly, Radio Milma sources content for its program *Lalona pa erow key* (Ruby Ashes) that informs the audience of new technological developments around the world by searching Pashto language websites on technology.

In addition, social media provides a novel platform on which stations can connect and interact with their audience off-air. All stations had a Facebook page on which they posted reports and pictures, thus adding a visual element to their on-air reporting. Social media was also used as a tool for gathering feedback on audience preferences.

Finally, the Salam Watandar network for many stations is an invaluable resource, not just because it provides stations with a monthly stipend but its programming is considered to be of high quality and added value to the offering of stations, especially in regard to news broadcasts and educational programs. Station staff repeatedly commented on how they *“learnt the proper way of talking and presenting from listening to Salam Watandar’s programs.”*⁸⁵ Managers, in addition, took inspiration from Salam Watandar programs, for example, roundtables, and started to produce these internally, focused on local happenings. Salam Watandar’s technical support, be it via phone or in person, facilitated the transfer of essential technical information to local radio station staff. Finally, the Salam Watandar network provided a measure of security through affiliation with a larger whole.

⁸⁵ Staff Member (Male) at Radio Kishim, Badakhshan, October 2016.

TRANSPORTATION

A significant impediment to the freedom of movement of station staff is poor infrastructure in rural Afghanistan, leaving more remote areas difficult to reach. On top of that, stations lacked means of transportation, such as a car. In order to go about this issue, some stations rented a car but this required advance bookings and could be costly, whilst others had staff use their own motorbikes, the fuel cost for which was inconsistently reimbursed. Lacking transportation limits field reporting. Unable to cover events across the broadcast area themselves, station staff is thus increasingly reliant upon informant networks and the internet. Poor infrastructure, in addition, entails that the transportation of equipment to Kabul for repair can take multiple days (between 2-3 from Ghor province, for example).

CONCLUSION

The organizational sustainability of local radio stations encompasses a wide variety of factors, the state of some of which bode better than others in regards to the future successes of local radio.

Insufficient human resource capacity stands out as a major stumbling block in the way of stations producing a variety of high-quality programs and fulfilling their various roles within society with success.

One of the main reasons that staff capacities are limited at most local stations is because of heavy reliance upon part-time volunteers. With few skills upon entering employment with the station, and often only a limited time with the station as they search for paid employment elsewhere, staff trainings remain limited to the basics and rarely evolve into longer-term capacity building projects. The high turnover rate engendered by volunteerism, in addition, hampers brand continuity as the latter is intimately linked with the identity of radio hosts.

With limited staff capacities, much falls on the shoulders of the station manager, the person that has usually been with the station longest and is most experienced. Not only does the manager drive strategic development, including business development, also his or her personal reputation can significantly lift up the station in the eyes of the communities in its coverage area, and thus help grow audience share. Female managers can add to the station's societal impact just by virtue of demonstrating the harmony that exists between Islam and female participation in public working life.

Radio staff and management, in addition to their own capacities, rely on external resources in order to keep the station running. They currently lack sufficient resources needed to make it run well. Although the necessary equipment is present, staff have only limited knowledge of how to use it properly. Lacking electricity as well as the costs associated with fuel for generators means broadcasts are limited, a significant disadvantage. The absence of proper means of transportation limits field reporting. Accordingly, station staff is increasingly reliant upon other sources of information. The internet plays a relatively new but very important role in this regard, as staff members consult national news websites to collect information for their own broadcasts.

The Salam Watandar network is itself a resource that helps stations cope with the aforementioned lack of resources. It has helped stations repair equipment, provides solar panels to deal with electricity shortfalls, and provides information through its own programming and website. For example, Radio Kishim's station manager describes Salam Watandar as a "long term ally," stating that "we can count on them" whilst a staff member explained that "I learnt the proper way of talking and presenting from listening to Salam Watandar's programs."⁸⁶

4.4. POLITICAL AND CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Insecurity has a crippling effect on the sustainability of local radio. Physical and verbal attacks lead to self-censorship, uneven news coverage of the station's broadcast area, and affect the business environment for stations.
- Most local radio stations are able to balance political neutrality and unbiased reporting, crucial for community support, with political goodwill and support networks that are necessary to gain

⁸⁶ Station Manager (male) and Staff Member (male) at Radio Kishim, Badakhshan, October 2016

access to information, verify information, and ensure the station's and its staff's security.

- Most stations enjoy community support. Stations have embedded themselves within the community from their establishment involving community elders and staffing the station with local community members. Their accountability role further endears them with the community, attesting to the practical use of the station within the community.
 - With significant community support, stations have been able to push social boundaries, broach sensitive topics, and thus drive social change.
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In recent years, developments within the country's political landscape have affected the enabling environment for and future sustainability of local radio. Increasing levels of insecurity across Afghanistan, the proliferation of media outlets supported directly or indirectly by political powerbrokers, and gaps in the application of rule of law have jeopardized media workers' safety, tainted public perception of media, and obstructed journalists gaining access to information.

The ability of local radio stations to remain politically and culturally sustainable in the face of these developments is assessed in reference to three primary factors. First, the effects of insecurity upon local radio, and measurements taken to minimize the risks associated with insecurity. Second, stations' ability to balance political neutrality with political goodwill. Finally, the ability of stations to balance community support and sensitivities with their aim of driving social change. This chapter is divided into three main sections, each consecutively dealing with one of the aforementioned factors.

INSECURITY

For local radio stations to be viable, they need to be able to operate in an environment that ensures the personal safety of their staff members. Security conditions, however, are deteriorating. 2016 has been marked, for example, as the year with the highest number of media worker deaths since 2001, with seven TOLO TV employees killed in January and subsequent attacks on local and foreign journalists.⁸⁷

In the face of such statistics, this section assesses the impact of insecurity upon the future sustainability of local radio. First the manifestations of insecurity in regard to local radio are examined. Second, the factors that contribute to local radio being a target of violence are considered. Subsequently, the effects of insecurity are explored. Finally, different ways of countering and minimizing the risk of insecurity are explored.

MANIFESTATIONS OF INSECURITY

Insecurity resounded across sample stations as a critical factor threatening the future sustainability of local radio. Station management and staff felt that the security situation had deteriorated in recent years and had no immediate hopes of it improving.⁸⁸ *"If the security situation continues as it is now, perhaps the radio's activities will stop,"* predicted the station manager of Kunduz' Radio Zohra.⁸⁹

Insecurity in regard to local radio stations manifests itself in two principal ways. First are physical attacks targeting a station that are either part of a broader conflict or isolated events. In regard to the former, Radio Zohra was overrun when Kunduz fell to the Taliban in September 2015. The station was ransacked, its equipment was stolen, and staff fled the city. In regard to the latter, the station manager of Radio Daikundi reported that a bomb exploded at the studio of rival station in Nili City by the name of Radio Nasim in October this year.⁹⁰

Second are verbal attacks or threats from powerbrokers including government officials, politicians, warlords, and insurgent groups. Threats can be directed not only at station staff but also their family members. The majority of case study stations' staff mentioned having received a threat at least once.

⁸⁷ TOLO: <http://www.toloneews.com/en/afghanistan/23401-seven-tolo-tv-employees-killed-in-wednesday-attack>

⁸⁸ A notable exception was Panjshir, a province with little insecurity.

⁸⁹ Acting Station Manager (Male) at Radio Zohra, Kunduz, November 2016.

⁹⁰ Investigations into the reason and details of the attack have thus far not led to any results.

LOCAL RADIO AS A TARGET

Clearly a target of physical and verbal violence, it serves to consider the factors that render local radio stations a target. As local watchdogs, holding local authorities and powerful people accountable for their actions or lack thereof, radio stations are put at risk of political retribution. This risk is exacerbated on account of a precarious rule of law and high levels of impunity for those with power.

As the accountability role, however, is seen as principal to local radio, interviewed station managers appeared unwilling to forsake their activities in this field. They instead have learnt to leverage their ties with the community as well as their access to a media platform to protect themselves and their staff from retribution.

Early October, news reached Radio Daikundi that a police detainee had been tortured by policemen. The station manager discussed the matter in a program called Qarawol, a program that deals with human rights and uses irony and parody to discuss sensitive issues. Police forces subsequently complained to the station, but the station manager firmly upholds that it was because of the station's community support, that local police did not lash out against the station following its reporting: "as we have support of people no one is able to defeat us."

Efforts to drive social change, furthermore, have in the past elicited threats from conservative elements in society. Discussing socially sensitive topics such as girls running away from their marital homes, employing women, and introducing new forms of entertainment such as music to a wide audience have all led to criticisms. In addition, simply being seen as working with the international community can make stations a target.

EFFECTS OF INSECURITY

Local radio's sustainability prospects are affected in a number of ways by insecurity. Firstly, station staff subjected themselves to self-censorship, not engaging with certain topics or editing externally produced programs. Self-censorship was keenly perceived by audience members, and usually not to the benefit of the general perception of the station.

Radio Khorasan's station manager in Panjshir stated that "we do not touch any issues that are very personal to some families or high-level government employees for fear that this might harm the radio in the future."

FGD participants, male and female, listeners and non-listeners, complained that the radio station refused to engage with the recent flourishing of marijuana cultivation in the valley. The sentiment was expressed that the radio station cowered in the face of power, and was unable to fulfill its role as supposed watchdog.⁹¹

Self-censorship, however, should be seen as an important mechanism for self-protection and ensuring community support. Strong ties with political powerbrokers and the community at large are of importance in the creation of safety networks, and the sourcing of information. Moderate self-censorship attests to stations' instinctive awareness of their audience's sensibilities; topics that can be broached and those that remain out of bounds for the time being. The fact that station staff is often entirely local facilitates this level of awareness, and allows for a measure of tailoring content that is impossible to replicate by larger media outlets.

Secondly, insecurity circumscribes reporters' freedom of movement within the station's coverage area, and their ability to collect news and information for all of the regions contained within it.

"Security has a direct impact on our work. We cannot go to insecure places so we provide estimated reports about what is happening in those places," said a staff member from Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor.

⁹¹ Radio Khorasan did not comment on this.

Such “estimated reports” have implications for the quality of news and information broadcasts as well as the station’s ability to be inclusive and representative of the communities it serves.

The phenomenon of reporting that is both qualitatively and quantitatively less due to insecurity is exacerbated by the brain-drain that insecurity brings. This is the third way in which sustainability prospects for local radio are affected by insecurity.

In Kunduz, Radio Zohra’s management and staff fled the city after it fell to the Taliban in September 2015, effectively shutting down the station. After the second attack was launched on the city in 2016, the station’s owner, Najia Khudayar, a woman with ample experience in media management, has decided to leave Afghanistan indefinitely. And the owner and manager of Radio Jaghuri has not set foot in the province for over two years.

Finally, insecurity robs local radio stations of business opportunities by crippling the local economy. As local businesses shut their doors and the private sector adopts an attitude of risk-aversion, local radio stations see their advertising revenues dwindle. As advertising revenues can make up a significant part of a station’s overall monthly income its financial sustainability prospects shrink.

For example, Radio Zohra’s acting station manager relays how his advertising revenues dropped 30% after the Taliban attack on the city in 2016, the second within the span of two years, and lists insecurity and a consequent flight of capital as the two main problems facing his station’s sustainability. As the station is heavily reliant upon advertising for its income (advertising revenues currently make up 83% of Radio Zohra’s total income), a further decline in advertising contracts due to persistent insecurity could be disastrous.

COUNTERING INSECURITY

As the aggregated effects of insecurity upon local radio bode ill for its sustainability, it serves to ask how local radio stations are countering the threats and effects of insecurity.

Among the stations, few had taken any measures to counter insecurity outside of practicing self-censorship and cementing community support. Some stations have on occasion requested police support, or reached out to journalist and media associations in order to garner strength in numbers.

There are, however, a number of ways in which local radio stations with the help of the international community can counter the threat and effects of insecurity.

Customized Security Assessments

Firstly, an individual security assessment for each station is warranted as each outlet operates in different settings, and faces different types of security threats that require different responses. Efforts to minimize the security risks associated with insurgency take a different shape than those that stem from pervasive violence against women, or localized tribal conflicts.

Following the security assessment, activities per security profile should be developed. These could include fortification, trainings, awareness and outreach campaigns. For example, staff members can be given a basic security training tailored to the specific issues they face. Such trainings could include de-escalation techniques and basic self-defense. Outreach programs to government officials that highlight the vested interest local governments have in functioning local media as a communication channel can help them take stations’ security concerns more seriously, which in turn might work as a deterrent in regard to external threats.

Community Support and Professional Networks

In general, however, each local radio station will benefit from garnering community support. The ability of a station to embed itself within the community and foster community ties will provide a measure of protection against different forms of harassment. Stations can ask themselves how community linkages can be strengthened. For example, has a station reached out sufficiently to community elders, communicated to them its security concerns, and asked for their input? Relationships with the religious establishment are also important and were exploited by most of the sample stations. As authoritative community members, mullahs have helped start and run stations, their local authority generating wider support for a station.

In order to garner community support for the establishment of Radio Khorasan in Panjshir in 2006,

Internews made sure to embed the station and its staff within the community. Internews approached the local directorate of the Ministry of Information and Culture and asked to be given a list of influential community members that could work with the radio station. Among the people that were thus involved in the set-up of the station was Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the manager of the Shahed Ahmed Shah Massoud Madrassah. To this day he works with the station and hosts the Islamic Q&A program Tajali.

In addition, stations should be encouraged to coordinate with and join networks such as journalist, civil society, or media associations. Such networks bring power in numbers as well as the anonymity of speaking as part of a large group, and might lead to professional synergies. When information, for example, is particularly sensitive, local radio stations can share it between independent outlets and coordinate its release in order to avoid being singled out as a target.

Journalists in Daikundi, among whom the station managers of the three local radio stations, Radio Daikundi, Radio Nasim, and Radio Aftab, grouped together and penned an open letter to Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan about local authorities' behavior towards journalists and the latter's refusal to share information with media. Nai forwarded the letter to the Ministry of Information and Culture, and to the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, requesting them to look into the matter. Nai's Media Watch unit, meanwhile, individually approached Daikundi's governor demanding an explanation.⁹²

When teaming up with other media professionals and reaching out to larger networks whose reach extends further into the echelons of power, individual radio stations protect themselves from political retribution at least to some extent.

Finally, strategic linkages with the donor community can be paramount for ensuring the safety of radio staff members. When Kunduz fell to the Taliban at the end of September 2015, it was on account of the station's affiliation to Salam Watandar that arrangements could be made for station staff to flee to neighboring Takhar province, and from there be flown by helicopter to safety in Kabul.

POLITICAL AFFILIATION AND SUPPORT

Local radio, like any form of media, is exposed to political forces that can constrain or facilitate its work. Political sustainability entails the ability of stations to balance political independence with working relations with local authorities. Recent years have witnessed the proliferation of media outlets supported directly or indirectly by political powerbrokers, tainting the public's overall perception of the media sector.⁹³ In light of this development, this section's focus is twofold. Firstly, it assesses the extent to which local radio stations are politically independent as well as the importance of political neutrality. Secondly, stations' ability to generate political goodwill is examined, in order both to ensure a measure of security and to facilitate their journalistic efforts.

POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

Political independence is one of the criteria that stations need to match in order to become and remain part of the Salam Watandar network. Political independence contributes to sustainability prospects for local radio stations for three reasons.

Firstly, in order to serve the entirety of the communities within its coverage area, to be inclusive and representative, it is paramount that local radio stations are not affiliated to one political party, ethnic, commercial or religious group, international donors or foreign governments.⁹⁴

Secondly, the 2014 Altai report on the Afghan media landscape noted that the emergency of radio stations and other media outlets backed by political groups had impacted the audience's trust in these outlets. With trustworthiness and neutrality major (outlet-related) pull factors, perceptions of political affiliation can affect community support for a radio station as well as its audience share. When asked

⁹² Nai: <http://nai.org.af/files/documents/mw/Nai%20Monthly%20Report%20133%20English.pdf> – June 2016

⁹³ *Afghanistan: Media and Election Processes*, report prepared by Jackie Sutton, 2012; *Afghan Media in 2010*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2010; *Afghan Media in 2014*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2014.

⁹⁴ *What is Community Radio? A Resource Guide*, report prepared by AMARC Africa and Panos Southern Africa, 1998: 17

why they listened to Radio Daikundi, for example, a female FGD participant answered “because this radio airs unbiased news.”⁹⁵ The same reason was proffered by male listeners also.

Thirdly, political independence is necessary for a station to be able to function as a tool of government accountability within the community. FGD participants, for example, described Radio Darman in Jawzjan as “the only neutral radio in our area that can convey the problems of people to the government.” And the station manager of Radio Kishim in Badakhshan stated that “the only reason that people listen to our radio is because we are neutral and also we are the only radio broadcasting people’s problem in this area.”⁹⁶ In addition, a radio station’s critical and fearless stance towards those in power raises its standing with the general public: Stations that were able to hold powerful people responsible were likely to enjoy support within the community on account of their demonstrated neutrality and ability to effect change, to serve and stand up for the public and to stand up for the public.

Given the risk of political retribution, however, the extent to which stations took on local authorities and powerbrokers differed, with some stations preferring to focus more on social rather than governance or political issues.

All stations within the sample claimed to be politically independent and to avoid linkages with local powerbrokers. “We are a radio and the voice of people, we cannot be in favor of any one party or person,” states the station manager of Radio Khorasan. “We do not want to be very close to politicians or ask for help because they might ask us to do favors for them.”

The station manager of Radio Daikundi was offered protection as well as a monthly stipend of \$1,000 by Sultan Ali, the former Daikundi province governor in exchange for the radio’s support for the Governor’s Office. The station manager rejected the offer in order to retain his station’s political independence.

Among community members, however, sounds surfaced on occasion in regard to the tribal affiliation of certain stations’ management. In the case of Sada-ye Hadalat, for example, male listeners to the station argued that all staff members were from one tribe (Sadaat), and that the station manager had tribal affiliations.

Recommendation: What conditions are necessary for local radio stations to be more politically independent?

- As political affiliation is often tied to funding, ensuring that stations have sufficient access to a diversified set of funding sources that includes both advertising revenues and support from the international community will make it easier for management to turn down offers such as that of the former governor of Daikundi. Another reason why the international community should in the near-term continue its financial support of local radio.
 - In addition, station management should ensure, where possible, that staff members are recruited from a variety of ethnic and /or tribal as well as religious backgrounds so as to make sure one group does not stand to monopolize running of the station.
 - Finally, Afghan authorities, the international community, and civil society should continue to press for the implementation of laws protecting both the media sector and media workers and fight impunity. With the law on their side, local radio stations are likely to feel more empowered to stand up to powerful individuals.
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POLITICAL GOODWILL

One of the challenges facing local radio stations is balancing political independence with political support. Insufficient linkages with people in power, or a complete lack thereof, can lead to powerful individuals and groups making life difficult for station staff by issuing threats or simply by refusing to cooperate. Conversely, working relationships with powerful people including government officials

⁹⁵ FGD Participant (Female, Listener) in Daikundi, October 2016.

⁹⁶ FGD Participant (Male, Listener) in Jawzjan, October 2016.

facilitate the work of radio stations for example, in regard to gathering or verifying information, and security protection. Politicians are part of community life, after all, and influential cogs in its development.

While access to information has been facilitated by the signing into law of the Access to Information Law by President Ghani in December 2014, ensuring citizens the right to access information from government institutions, despite such regulatory provisions, journalists find minimal application of the laws enshrined to protect them and to facilitate their work.⁹⁷ Staff members of the sample stations cite obstructions when trying to access or verify information.

Being denied access to information was the main motivation for Daikundi journalists to write an open letter to Nai in June this year. “The journalists’ problem with the Daikundi Governor arises from her denying journalists access to information. Journalists repeatedly go to the office of the governor and ask for information. Officials usually procrastinate, keeping journalists waiting for a month, only to ultimately deny them access to information,” states Mirza Hassani, the manager of Radio Aftab. The station manager of Radio Daikundi chimes in: “In a meeting, the governor promised to share information with journalists. However, since then, the governor has not only broken her promise, but the situation to access information has gotten worse.”⁹⁸

Without access to information or the ability to verify information, the quality of local radio’s reporting can easily be compromised, affecting its perception within the community. In addition, staff members waste time jumping through political hoops to access information, a further strain on staff capacities.

Enjoying political goodwill can facilitate station staff gaining access to information in this regard and position it well to provide input into local governance decisions, especially in relation to media.

Recommendation: How can stations generate more political goodwill?

- The ability to network with people of influence is a driver of success for local radio stations. In this regard, stations would do well to expand and draw upon their networks to stand strong in the face of power.
 - Staff members of certain stations have used the law as leverage when trying to gain access to information from government officials. For example, a staff member from Radio Sada-ye Hadalat considers knowledge of the legal framework to be an asset: “knowledge of the Media Law helps us do our work. We know to be in touch with which government organ when, and to make sure we have the approval of the relevant official before we air any information thus obtained.” Radio Khorasan’s station staff also references relevant laws in order to add legitimacy to their access to information requests. These include the Mass Media Law as well as the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) when talking about women’s issues.
 - Further sensitizing both station staff and government officials to the content of the relevant legal framework, and the responsibilities of each within it, should facilitate smoother and clarified working relationships between the two.
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COMMUNITY SENSIBILITIES

The ability of stations to balance community support and sensitivities with their aim of driving social change is examined in this section.

Anchorage within the community brings a local radio station legitimacy, knowledge of its audience’s preferences and needs, facilitates news coverage with community members serving as informal informants, provides a measure of security, especially for staff members when they are out in the field, and is linked to a station’s ability to retain a sizeable audience. Community support, accordingly,

⁹⁷ *Dispatches: Tightening chokehold on Afghanistan’s Media*, report prepared by Human Rights Watch, 2015.

⁹⁸ Nai: <http://nai.org.af/files/documents/mw/Nai%20Monthly%20Report%20133%20English.pdf>

is a key contributor to the success of local radio stations, and needs to be fostered in order to ensure sustainability.⁹⁹

As a driver of social change, however, local radio's relationship with the community can on occasion grow tense. In order to establish how stations can best balance community support with their developmental role, first criticisms levelled by the community against local radio stations are examined as well as the way in which stations have coped with these. Subsequently, the role of external programming in offending as well as changing local sensibilities is considered.

COMMUNITY CRITICISM

Station staff and management throughout the sample emphasized that everything they do is in accordance with Islam as well as local culture: "my programs are all according to Islam and everything I say is according to Islamic Law."¹⁰⁰ In general, most issues could be discussed on the radio without offending the sensibilities of the community as long as Islam was respected and issues were discussed in an appropriate manner. Critical discussions of politics were often considered to be more palatable than discussions of social issues. Nevertheless, most stations had experienced community criticism at least once.

Numerous radio stations commented on initial community skepticism when the station was established. The management of Radio Khorasan, when it started broadcasting in Panjshir in 2006, was asked by community members to not play music as they feared music was not Islamic. Community criticism could also be voiced following reporting on sensitive issues. When Radio Daikundi reported on a girl running away from her in-laws' household, the station was criticized by the families involved.

COMMUNITY SENSIBILITIES AND EXTERNAL PROGRAMMING

External programming, on the one hand, being produced from the center is less tailored to local cultural sensibilities than internal programming, and accordingly can clash with these at times. On the other hand, exactly because it is produced in the center, external programming is not always subjected to the same degree of moral scrutiny as internally-produced programming is. Consequently it can sometimes more easily push social boundaries.

Some of the stations received criticism from the community on account of external programming aired by the station. Radio Daikundi, for example, was criticized for broadcasting music, part of Salam Watandar programming, on holy days. Radio Khorasan reported an instance when parts of a UNAMA-produced program aired by Radio Khorasan were not seen as matching with Panjshir's local culture.

Clashes between external/Salam Watandar programming and local cultural sensibilities raise questions regarding the extent to which Salam Watandar is identified with the local radio station. Discussions with listeners in Badakhshan, for example, showed that when asked what stations they listened to, they often listed Salam Watandar and Radio Kishim separately as many were under the impression the two were different stations sharing a frequency.

External programming can thus serve as somewhat of a two-edged sword when it comes to community sensibilities and driving social change. It can cause tensions between a station and its community, on the one hand, yet on the other, help a station avoid community criticism by taking the lead in tackling sensitive issues.

HOW DO STATIONS COPE WITH COMMUNITY CRITICISM?

Local radio stations have engaged with criticisms in three principal ways. Stations can cope with criticism by making adjustments, by ignoring criticism and persevering with their activities, or resolving conflict through discussion.

Perseverance

Radio Khorasan ignored the community's request to not play music and over the years, with increased exposure to a variety of on-air content, criticism about music being broadcast has dissipated. A process of habituation has been at work. According to one community elder: "*anything*

⁹⁹ *Signposting Success: Civil Society in Afghanistan*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2012

¹⁰⁰ Staff Member (Male) at Radio Khorasan, Panjshir, September 2016.

that comes to a community new, especially media, will be criticized. But now that people have used the media, they know that it is good.”

Adjustment

Radio Daikundi, in response to criticism about music being aired during holy days, now edits all external programming, including that of Salam Watandar, that is to be aired on holy days such as Ashura, replacing music with religious content. The same happens for music programs that clash with prayer times.

Resolution

In 2014, the Director of Hajj sent a warning letter to Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor in regard to its employment of female staff. The station manager in response discussed the issue with the Hajj directorate and the matter was resolved. Radio Khorasan also reached out to UNAMA about its programming, and asked whether either they themselves could edit the program, or UNAMA might be able to make adjustments.

It should be noted that none of these responses should be universally considered better than another – what is important is that stations have at their disposal a number of strategies to engage with community criticism.

CONCLUSION

Most stations were able to balance political neutrality and unbiased reporting with political goodwill and support networks that facilitate the station’s work in terms of gaining access to information, and ensuring the station’s and its staff’s security.

Community support is of key importance to the sustainability of the stations, and from the onset, stations have made sure to embed themselves within the local community. Community elders were involved in stations’ establishment, local community members make up the station’s staff. Community support is further cemented through outreach efforts by station management, perceptions of the station’s political independence and ability to serve as a watchdog as well as interaction with the community both on and off air, and programming that caters to community needs.

Community support not only adds a network of security around stations, it also allows stations to push social boundaries, broach sensitive topics, and thus drive social change – but at a rate that does not risk severe community tensions. Whilst community criticisms do occur, for example, on account of programming that is deemed inappropriate, be it locally or externally produced, most stations have been able to avoid conflict.

4.5. AUDIENCE SUSTAINABILITY

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Local radio stations play a role within their communities as local information provider, local entertainer, local watchdog, and as the voice of local civil society, that cannot be replicated by other media accessible to rural communities.
- Other media either do not have a sufficiently wide reach (print media, internet) in these areas or have a national rather than local focus which precludes them from tailoring their offering to specific localities (television, national radio).
- The established media evolution theory of functional equivalence holds that the arrival of new media whose role is not equivalent to that of older media will not lead to the latter’s demise. Accordingly, different media can complement one another.
- Local radio has carved out a niche for itself that does not compete with national radio or television because it fulfills similar roles but on a local scale and thus answers different needs. These needs are not just about information and entertainment, but about belonging, inclusion, participation, joint efforts, agency, and development. Local radio is therefore likely to serve a sizeable audience in the near future also.
- In order to retain their ‘local edge’ and ability to provide highly relevant and tailored information to their audience, stations need to maximize audience feedback gathering, interaction, and

The ability to build and retain a sizeable audience is paramount to the future sustainability of local radio stations. Not only would a loss of audience defeat the purpose of local radio, audience size was also the primary consideration among the advertisers interviewed when allotting advertising contracts, thus feeding into financial sustainability. In addition, a significant audience share can be considered an implicit reflection of community support, and is thus linked to cultural sustainability.

This chapter assesses how sustainable independent local radio stations are in terms of their audience: do they serve a sizeable audience and are they likely to do so in the future? It also assesses the conditions that are necessary for local radio stations to become more sustainable in this respect.

In recent years, developments within the media landscape have called into question the future audience sustainability of local radio. Increasing competition from other radio stations at both the local and national level as well as from other media, notably television and internet, has jeopardized local radio stations' audience share.

The ability of local radio stations to retain their audience in the face of increasing competition rests on three factors. First, the station's ability to cater to the needs of the communities in its broadcast area. Second, the station's ability to be inclusive and representative of the communities in its broadcast area. Finally, the station's ability to carve out a niche role for itself in order to minimize functional overlap with other media accessible in its broadcast area. This chapter is divided into three main sections, each dealing with one of the aforementioned factors.

In conclusion, local radio stations play a role within their communities as local information provider, local entertainer, local watchdog, and as the voice of local civil society, that cannot be replicated by other media accessible to rural communities. Other media either do not have a sufficiently wide reach (print media, internet) in these areas or have a national rather than local focus which precludes them from tailoring their offering to specific localities (television, national radio). The established media evolution theory of functional equivalence holds that the arrival of new media whose role is not equivalent to that of older media will not lead to the latter's demise. Accordingly, different media can complement one another. Local radio has carved out a niche for itself that does not compete with national radio or television because it fulfills similar roles but on a local scale and thus answers different needs. These needs are not just about information and entertainment, but about belonging, inclusion, participation, joint efforts, agency, and development. Local radio is therefore likely to serve a sizeable audience in the near future also.

LOCAL RADIO'S ABILITY TO CATER TO THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

For local radio stations to retain a competitive edge versus national radio as well as other media, notably television and internet, it needs to provide the communities within its broadcast area with programming that is highly relevant to the specific needs of those communities.

In order to achieve this level of tailoring, stations need to gather information on and take into account the community's information needs, and to take these into account in the production of high-quality programming.

This section, accordingly, examines the ability of stations to gather feedback from their audiences, the extent to which feedback weighs into programming decisions, and the station's capacity to produce for its audience high-quality programs of unparalleled levels of relevance.

GATHERING AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

None of the stations had a systematic way of gathering information on audience feedback, resulting in very limited knowledge of their audience's preferences/needs and radio consumption behaviors.¹⁰¹

Stations instead relied upon in-person interaction with audience members, calls to the studio, and social media in order to form an understanding of their audience's needs, likes and dislikes.

Person-to-Person

¹⁰¹ *Afghan Media in 2014*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2014.

Reporters, for example, gather feedback from community members when they are covering incidents in the field. As the station manager is often a well-known figure within the community, he is also approached by community members with comments. Finally, community members go to the station in order to request information or share suggestions, with centrally located stations experiencing higher numbers of drop-ins.

While the research team was visiting Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor, a man walked up to the station and told the station manager that his son had been lost for the last four hours. The manager collected some information about the boy, and 30 minutes later the missing person announcement was aired.

Calls to the studio

The sample stations used calls to the studio as a key measure of the success of certain programs. During live programs with an interactive format such as roundtables, Q&A programs, or entertainment programs during which listeners could request songs, stations reported receiving up to 200 calls over the course of an hour. Calls are facilitated by high rates of mobile phone ownership in rural Afghanistan.¹⁰²

Social Media

Social media has offered stations a new platform to interact with the community off-air and to gather its feedback. All of the case study stations had a Facebook page that was managed by the station manager.

Without any systematic approach to gathering audience feedback, preferences remain anecdotal and ad hoc, leaving stations with only an approximate idea of the community's needs, likes and dislikes. This knowledge gap stands in the way of producing highly relevant content that constitutes local radio's competitive edge. In addition, stations are unable to draw upon knowledge of their audience and lack a key set of tools that could be used in negotiations with advertisers. For example, knowing the station's audience size could justify advertising rates, or knowing that a station is particularly popular among a specific segment of the population could highlight its relative value to an advertiser wanting to target this segment.

Recommendation: How can local radio stations increase their ability to gather feedback from their audiences?

- Knowledge of one's audience is key to improve sustainability, and recognized as such by station managers: "it is important to gather feedback from the audience, because the radio belongs to the audience and we want to broadcast the programs that they want," says the station manager of Radio Zohra. Yet, as local radio stations have access to meagre financial resources and enjoy limited staff capacities, anything more systematic than basic canvassing at present is unrealistic for most of the stations.
- As every station had a Facebook page, social media provides an opportunity for increasing and systematizing audience feedback that is inexpensive and requires little effort. Facebook allows page and group administrators to design short surveys, and to administer them on their page. Whilst such a survey would target an unrepresentative sample, men with internet access mostly, it would provide a measure of additional information. Station staff can announce the survey on air, and ask listeners to fill out the survey with the female members of their household.
- In addition, stations could organize quarterly events for audience members to mingle with station staff, reach out to community elders and other representatives of the community more, and draw increasingly upon their relationships with local CSOs to find out what issues are plaguing the community.

¹⁰² The 2016 Asia Foundation *Survey of the Afghan People* found that the rate of personal ownership of mobile phones in rural areas was 50% with men twice as likely as women to own a device. Prior to widespread mobile phone usage, stations had placed letterboxes in strategic spots across their broadcast area for audience members to deposit letters in.

TAKING AUDIENCE FEEDBACK INTO ACCOUNT

Receiving only limited feedback, stations made an effort to take it into account what they could in regard to programming decisions. Such efforts were appreciated by the audience, endearing a station with the community by giving it a sense of agency and influence.

Examples of stations implementing changes in programming abound. From extending the news broadcast for a few minutes, to not broadcasting music during prayer times and dedicating episodes of educational programs to topics that have been suggested by the community.

Radio Milma in Paktika is representative of stations that make a concerted effort to include the community's needs in its programming. The station has weekly staff meetings wherein audience feedback is discussed and possibilities of implementation considered. In response to overwhelming community demand, an episode of Wolas Hindar (The People's Mirror) was dedicated to dowry practices. Local religious scholars were invited on the show and highlighted that this timeworn tradition is, in fact, not allowed within Islam. Likewise, episodes of Gardey Mez (Roundtable) are based on audience requests. The station seeks out experts on whatever topic has been selected, thus seeing to it that the community has its questions answered, and ensuring content responds to local concerns.

Focus group discussions revealed that stations are praised for the extent to which they take audience members' feedback into account. When asked whether Radio Milma in Paktika met the information and entertainment needs of its audience, listeners responded in the affirmative *"because they are listening to our requests."*¹⁰³ Conversely, when a station is perceived as not taking into account the wishes of the audience, it negatively affects overall perception of the station and can lead audience members to stop listening to the station. A female FGD participant in Ghazni, for example, stated that she had initially started listening to Radio Jaghuri *"because it is our local radio"* but stopped *"because it does not pay attention to our ideas."*¹⁰⁴

Local radio stations, more than their national competitors, are expected by the community to take to hearts its suggestions. Not only was this seen as part of local radio's duty, but because of the locality, small size, and flexibility of stations, they were seen as being better-positioned to interact with their audiences and make programming adjustments accordingly: community members had the phone numbers of the stations' presenters and experienced neither psychological nor physical barriers reaching out to the station. Audience members were, accordingly, less forgiving when their local station failed to interact with them or take their feedback seriously and listed both as factors that had alienated listeners.

Recommendation: How can stations increase their ability to implement feedback?

- The ability to implement audience feedback is not only crucial to ensuring content meets the demands of the community but contributes to the positive perception of the radio station within the community. Stations would do well to emphasize their responsiveness on air, highlighting changes that have been made in programming and stating explicitly that these were implemented in order to meet audience demands.
- Radio Milma sets an example by organizing weekly staff meetings during which audience feedback is collated and discussed. This also encourages staff members to systematically keep track of listener requests and community feedback, for example, by noting comments down in a notebook.

¹⁰³ FGD Participant (Male, Listener), in Paktika, November 2016.

¹⁰⁴ FGD Participant (Female, Non-Listener) in Ghazni, November 2016.

THE ABILITY OF LOCAL RADIO TO BE INCLUSIVE AND REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMUNITY

Local radio stations, because of their small scale and local focus, have a competitive edge versus national radio as well as other media on account of their ability to be inclusive and representative of the communities within their broadcast areas.

Unlike national radio, television or internet, local radio presents itself as and is considered to be “the voice of the people.” It serves to examine who exactly stations speak on behalf of and the extent to which they are to make good on this claim.

In order to be inclusive and representative, stations need to demarcate their coverage area, broadcast programs that target different segments of society in the various languages that are spoken in their broadcast areas, and engage both men and women in the running and programming of the station.

This section, accordingly, examines the implications for local radio stations of extending their broadcast area, the extent to which stations target different groups within society through a variety of programs in a variety of languages, and women’s involvement in local radio as well as the implications for audience retention or a lack thereof.

COVERAGE

Stations’ ability to be representative and inclusive of the different groups within their coverage area depends on the size of the coverage area, especially if the latter is marked by ethnic and linguistic diversity. Stations need to be able to cover incidents in all regions in the broadcast area, an effort that requires access to transportation and field reporters and which is often marred by barred roads and insecurity. Stations also need to be knowledgeable about the different groups living within its coverage area so that it can customize programming accordingly, an effort that requires staff capacity. A staff member from Radio Sol-e Paigham in Khost stated, for example, that “*we collect information about the local cultures and traditions of the area and we incorporate these into our programs.*”¹⁰⁵

All stations expressed the desire to increase their coverage. Some, Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor and Radio Milma in Paktika, already had concrete plans in place to do so. For local stations to remain inclusive and representative of the communities in their broadcast area, coverage extension needs to be carefully considered. Stations need to assess first whether they have the capacity to cover news across the regions of the extended area, and whether they have the demographic knowledge to offer the communities within the area relevant and understandable programming.

When coverage expansion is opted for, stations do well to retain a local focus by employing staff members from different regions and social groups within the broadcast area as well as by expanding its network of and drawing upon local informants.

STATIONS TARGET ALL SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY IN LANGUAGES OF THE BROADCAST AREA

In order to be inclusive and representative of the different groups within their broadcast areas, stations need to broadcast a variety of programs targeting men and women, old and young people, and in the languages that are spoken in the broadcast.

Programming

The ability of stations to provide a variety of programming targeting all segments of local society varied but most stations made an effort to cater to different groups within their broadcast area.

Radio Milma targets local youth with its telephone entertainment program by the name of Sta Azar (Your View), aired 5 days a week (not on Thursdays and Fridays) between 11am and noon. During this hour, young people within the community are provided with an on-air platform on which they can share their opinions, and read out their poems and jokes. Older people enjoy the program Musiqi Aram (Calm Music), aired by Radio Zohra in Kunduz every night from 10:30pm to 11pm. Radio Jaghuri in Ghazni has a program by the name of Zan wa Zindagi (Woman and Life) that targets women. Radio Daikundi’s political program Nobat Shema (Your turn) is popular with working and older men.

Stations in ethnically diverse areas were observed to be making a concerted effort to be inclusive of different ethnic and linguistic groups, and to balance the voices heard on air. In Kishim (Badakhshan)

¹⁰⁵ Staff Member (Male) at Radio Sol-e Paygham, Khost, December 2016.

and Aqcha (Jawzjan), audience members were highly appreciative of shows that reflected the regional culture and emphasized common bonds between different groups. A female audience member of Radio Kishim stated that *“people living in this community are from different tribes and ethnic groups so the station should motivate unity among people.”*¹⁰⁶ In Ghor, the community elders interviewed praised programs that promote regional unity and harmonious living among the tribes of Ghor. One accordingly described the station as a *“mirror of the people, it has programs for everyone.”*¹⁰⁷

In line with these observations, 87% of audience survey respondents that knew the station within its area found it to represent all segments of the community well, and only 13% disagreed. In Daikundi, Ghor, and Jawzjan 100% of respondents even answered in the affirmative.

Language

The dominant broadcast language should fit the language best understood by the majority of residents within the station’s coverage area. Most stations broadcast in a mix of Dari and Pashto, with ratios depending on the dominant language spoken in the broadcast area. Whilst in Paktika, 80% of Radio Milma’s programming is in Pashto, and 20% in Dari, for Radio Daikundi, these numbers are reversed with 79% of programming in Dari, 20% in Pashto, and an additional 1% in Uzbek.

Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor, Radio Khorasan in Panjshir, and Radio Darman in Jawzjan air

Figure 10: Radio Darman’s studio, Jawzjan



programs in the widest variety of languages. Sada-ye Hadalat and Radio Khorasan in Panjshir both broadcast 60% in Dari, 30% in Pashto, 5% in Uzbek, and 5% in English, and Radio Darman broadcasts 60% in Dari, 20% in Uzbek, 15% in Turkmen, and 5% in Pashto.

The mix of languages bodes well for a station’s ability to be both representative and inclusive as it allows the radio station to cater to different linguistic groups within its coverage area, and to broadcast in a language or dialect, and using a lexicon, that is familiar to its audience. Accordingly, there were no issues understanding the broadcast content of the researched stations. Of the audience survey respondents that knew the case study station, 85% found the station’s broadcast content ‘very easy’ to understand, and an additional 14% found it ‘fairly easy’. Only 1% found

the content ‘a bit difficult’ to understand.

At times, however, multilingual programming causes mild aggravation among listeners. In Jawzjan, for example, two female FGD listeners complained about programs in Turkmen because they do not understand the language. However, *“this is not a big issue as they also have a right to have a program in their own language.”* In ethnically and linguistically diverse districts such as Jawzjan’s Aqcha especially multilingual programming is an important tool for the radio station to impart a sense of inclusion to all communities within its broadcast area. As one male listener noted: *“Aqcha is a district where different ethnic groups live so there must be programs in everyone’s language.”*

WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT

The research found that women’s involvement is crucial when it comes to female audience retention. During the focus group discussion with non-listeners in Badakhshan (Radio Kishim), for example, the women all mentioned a lack of female presenters and women’s voices as well as insufficient engagement with women’s rights as one of the main reasons that they stopped listening to the station.

In general women’s involvement appeared to be relatively high for stations in Hazara-dominant areas such as Daikundi and Jaghuri, and lower in predominantly Pashtun regions such as Paktika and Khost. This observation corresponds to different prevailing gender dynamics between the two ethnic

¹⁰⁶ FGD Participant (Female, Listener) in Badakhshan, October 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Community Elder (Male) in Ghor, October 2016.

groups: Hazara women tend to be less constrained by behavioral norms that limit their activities outside of their households.¹⁰⁸

A lack of women's involvement affects the level to which a station can represent and be inclusive of the entirety of its audience. Radio Milma's management, for example, admits that it cannot reflect community realities, or represent the communities within its broadcast area to the extent that it would like, as it employs no female staff and does not engage with women's rights in its programming. This is also acutely perceived to be the case by women themselves. The audience survey data for Khost, for example, illustrates that of female listeners of Radio Sol-e Paygham, only one third (33%) felt the station represented the community, 67% felt it did not. For male listeners, these percentages lay at 87% and 13% respectively.¹⁰⁹

When a station profiles itself as 'the voice of the people' – as all stations did – but only speaks for one half of the community, it risks alienating the other half. As noted previously, audiences have high expectations of local radio, and are keenly aware of 'obligations' not being fulfilled.

A further obstacle in this respect is that even if a station is willing to push social boundaries by hiring women, it may be incapable of finding capable or willing female staff. Not only is female school enrollment in Afghanistan still lower than for males, leaving fewer women qualified to work in media, but cultural prejudice against women working has made it difficult for media outlets to attract female staff. Radio Kishim in Badakhshan was looking for a female presenter for a GIZ sponsored program but despite offering a salary of 10,000 AFN per month, it was unable to attract any candidates.

Recommendation: How can stations involve more women and make stations more representative?

- Examples of stations that have hired women in the face of initial skepticism and criticism show that perseverance in this respect can bear fruit. Most noticed initial resistance from the community against female presenters on the radio. However, they also noted that this resistance was overcome reasonably quickly on account of exposure. Hearing a female voice on the radio became the new normal. In some instances, female presenters have even gathered quite a following.

Khost, Radio Sol-e Paigham: According to a staff member, "two years ago we faced a problem with a local mullah who did not accept that a girl had called into the studio and her voice was broadcast." The station aired a program for women that invited women to call into the studio and to read a poem or sing a song. "Our manager talked with the mullah and told him that men and women are both part of the community." The Khost Ulema Council, however, disagreed with the program and it was pulled off-air.

¹⁰⁸ *Afghan Women and the Taliban: An Exploratory Assessment*, ICCT Policy Brief prepared by Seran de Leede, April 2014

¹⁰⁹ Conversely, audience survey data for stations that employed female staff such as Radio Daikundi, Radio Zohra, and Radio Darman saw minimal discrepancies between the answers of male and female respondents in regard to the level of representativeness of the station and high approval rates of over 90%.



Radio Sol-e Paigham, Khost

Stations can facilitate this adaptation process by dedicating some of its educational programs to human and women's rights, especially within the context of Islam. Drawing upon local religious authorities, trusted by the community, and involving community elders as well as other community representatives such as CSO workers in a public discussion can pave the way for actually employing women. Examples, if there are any, of local women that have a solid religious reputation and are publicly active can also be highlighted.

LOCAL RADIO IN COMPETITION WITH OTHER MEDIA

Increasing competition from other radio stations at both the local and national levels as well as from other media, notably television and internet, has jeopardized local radio stations' audience share.

This section examines the ability of local radio stations to carve out a niche role for itself in order to minimize functional overlap with other media accessible in its broadcast area, and thus retain a sizeable audience in the face of increasing competition.

A conceptual framework for competition among media, and the media sector's evolution is first drawn out in order to better understand how local radio in Afghanistan might fit into this. Competition among radio stations, both local and national, is then taken into account. The final segment looks at competition between local radio and other media such as television and internet.

MEDIA COMPETITION AND EVOLUTION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Local radio stations face increasing competition on account of a proliferation of (local) FM radio stations and the successes of long-established national radio stations as well as the introduction of and increasing usage of newer forms of media such as television and internet. Considering these developments, it serves to briefly think through dominant theories of media change and the light these might shed on the future sustainability of local radio in Afghanistan.

The displacement theory of media evolution holds that when a new medium is introduced, it competes with and ultimately replaces the older medium. Displacement takes place when two media overlap to large extents, that is to say, they fulfill the same audience needs.¹¹⁰ The fact that some media such as telephones and newspapers have survived the birth of new media (albeit with major changes), however, discredits the universal applicability of the displacement theory. A more nuanced picture is painted by the functional equivalence theory, the most widely accepted framework for media competition and evolution, that holds that the arrival of a new medium that serves the same function

¹¹⁰ *Revisiting Interpersonal Media Competition*, Artemio Ramirez, John Dimmick, John Feaster, and Shu-Fang Lin, 2008

as an older technology will dominate.¹¹¹ This theory explains, for example, the closing of movie theaters and magazines that feature the type of content now available on television and online. Crucial, however, is that these media are not fully replaced but merely become less popular and/or are used in different ways.

The functional equivalence theory emphasizes competition between media but perhaps does not give sufficient attention to the possibility of media complementing each other in cases of little overlap. Niche mediums can coexist in limited resource environments.¹¹² They compete with one another for audience attention but not necessarily to replace each other.¹¹³

What this entails concretely, is that local radio stands the largest chance of surviving alongside other media if it can carve out a role for itself that has the least possible overlap with the roles played by national radio and other media such as television and internet. In an increasingly competitive media environment, one accordingly can expect functional specialization.

INCREASED RADIO COMPETITION

A proliferation of radio outlets has marked the Afghan media landscape since the first radio station, Radio Sulh, started broadcasting in 2002: by 2010, 175 FM radio outlets were active.¹¹⁴ Whilst in more recent years, the radio outlet growth rate has slowed, the sector is still growing, giving rise to increased levels of competition among radio stations.¹¹⁵

Competition within the radio sector takes on two predominant forms. First is competition among local FM radio stations. Second is competition with radio stations with a national reach that broadcast on AM shortwave. The two forms require different strategic responses.

Local Radio

Only a few stations had a complete monopoly on local broadcasting in their area, facilitating a majority audience share (especially when reception of BBC or Radio Azadi programs on shortwave was poor), for example, Radio Khorasan in Panjshir, and Radio Darman in Aqcha, Jawzjan. Most of the sample stations, however, had witnessed the establishment of other local radio stations within their coverage area, especially within the last two to three years.

For example, in the case of Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor, two stations in its coverage area were established in 2014, Radio Feroz Koh, and Radio Sarhat. In Daikundi, two other local FM stations in Nilli City, had been set up in addition to Radio Daikundi, Radio Nasim (2010) and Radio Aftab.¹¹⁶ In general, the level of local competition was dependent on an urban/rural divide with radio sectors in urban centers much more developed. Accordingly, the radio landscape most competitive among the case studies was found in Kunduz where a total of 7 local FM radio stations, including Radio Zohra, were active.

This recent development has led to competition among local stations over audience share, advertising and paid programming contracts, a relatively novel experience for the stations as each had been the first local station to be established in its area. Competition, in turn, led to predatory pricing in order to secure advertising contracts. When UNICEF wanted to air an advertisement in Ghor, for example, Sada-ye Hadalat bid 100 AFN per minute, Feroz Koh 99 AFN per minute, and Radio Sarhad offered 30 AFN per minute. Such undercutting is distortive of the local advertising market.

¹¹¹ *Theories of Media Evolution*, Russell Neuman, 2012:12

¹¹² *Revisiting Interpersonal Media Competition*, Artemio Ramirez, John Dimmick, John Feaster, and Shu-Fang Lin, 2008: 530

¹¹³ *Theories of Media Evolution*, Russell Neuman, 2012; In North America and Europe, for example, when television started to overshadow radio as the primary form of entertainment in the home, radio found an outlet for its offerings in the car.

¹¹⁴ *Afghan Media in 2010*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2010

¹¹⁵ *Afghan Media in 2014*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2014

¹¹⁶ Radio Aftab ceased broadcasting in 2015.

Recommendation: How can stations face this type of local competition?

- As local radio stations are likely to display high levels of functional overlap and share the local 'edge' in terms of the relevance and language of broadcasts, the sample stations are hard pressed to distinguish themselves in terms of relevance and roles played. Other pull factors, discussed in the chapter on the role and impact of local radio, come into play such as the reputation of the respective radio stations, their political neutrality, the accuracy of their news coverage, the extent to which they are inclusive of the wider community, the reliability of their broadcast schedule, and the sound quality of their broadcasts.
 - An additional way in which many of the stations managed to stay ahead of their local competitors was by pulling rank as the first local radio station to be established within their area. This was, for example, the case with both Radio Sada-ye Hadalat in Ghor and Radio Daikundi. As these stations and their respective communities had developed together in the post-Taliban years, and the stations were able to cement their reputation among a habitual and loyal audience, they enjoyed a competitive advantage in relation to the newcomers.
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National Radio

Virtually all respondents (audience survey and FGD participants) had access to BBC and Radio Azadi broadcasts via AM shortwave, and to some extent to Radio Ashna (Voice of America) via AM and FM. Providing information, entertaining the community, educating the community, mobilizing the community, holding government authorities accountable, and giving a voice to civil society are roles that these radio stations play also. In fact, they were perceived to better play these roles on account of their access to larger resources, including professional staff members.

Qualitatively, national radio stations might, thus, pose a significant threat to the audience sustainability of local radio stations. What national stations, however, cannot do is perform the aforementioned roles at a local level for their target audience is national. While like local radio, these stations broadcast in multiple languages (BBC Dari, BBC Pashto, for example) they do not, and do not attempt to, provide highly localized information on events not worthy of a national audience, or to entertain their audience with poems from local amateurs, to hold local power brokers accountable, or to provide a platform for local civil society organizations.

Trying to cater to the needs of a national Afghan audience, national radio cannot provide communities with the opportunity to participate in programs, and to be representative and inclusive of all the communities in their broadcast area, to the same extent that local radio can.

Note that this poses a problem for local radio stations that air proportionally sizeable amounts of national programming, be it from Salam Watandar, or another content producer. 75% of Radio Jaghuri's (Ghazni) 10-hour daily programming is made up of Salam Watandar targeting a national audience. Radio Jaghuri was also the one station among the sample that was chastised for not "not paying attention to the people's problem or the audience's input."¹¹⁷

It should also be noted that AM frequencies suffer from atmospheric interference and reception can be poor. As the sound quality of radio stations was frequently remarked upon as a pull factor by FGD participants and community elders, local radio stations have this advantage as well.

Radio Afghanistan: A Special Case

Radio Afghanistan is a national broadcaster that broadcasts via FM. While it has a similarly national focus, it cannot be straightforwardly compared with the likes of the BBC and Radio Azadi. Focus group participants and community elders were skeptical of Radio Afghanistan where it was available, citing its pro-government bias and lack of innovation as reasons. For none of the focus group participants was it the preferred radio station.

How can local radio stations retain audience share in the face of the successes of their national competitors?

¹¹⁷ FGD Participant (Female, Non-Listener) in Ghazni, November 2016

Given the superior resources of national radio stations such as the BBC and Radio Azadi, local radio stations need to capitalize on their local 'edge'. Stations can take inspiration from their national brothers in terms of mission and programming but consistently should translate this to a local level/format. As long as this is the case, and a minimum standard of professionalism and quality is upheld, local and national stations share little functional overlap.

In regard to balancing externally and internally produced programming, this means that local radio stations should exert caution. Whilst external programming provides them with a high-quality programming basis, it should remain that – a basis upon which stations can build their own locally tailored programming.

IS LOCAL RADIO SET TO LOSE OUT TO TV AND INTERNET?

Over the last decade and a half, radio usage has changed – both quantitatively and qualitatively – as dynamics in the wider media landscape change, new forms of media gain a foothold and become increasingly widespread. Improved infrastructure and technological innovations, including the increasing presence of solar power systems from China and India, have brought rural areas some way in addressing the problems posed by lack of electricity and allowed for increased television penetration, a major concern for sustainability of local radio stations.

This section examines the audience sustainability of local radio in the face of rising television and internet usage rates and considers the conditions that are necessary for local radio to retain a sizeable audience share. Both factors that impede the flourishing of these rival media in rural areas as well as the added value of local radio within the present media landscape are considered. First local radio and television are considered, subsequently, local radio and the internet.

RADIO AND TELEVISION

Recent studies have shown a significant rise in rates of TV ownership and usage. The 2014 Altai report on the Afghan media landscape notes that television has become the dominant type of media, especially in urban areas. Among its sample of informants, 62% turn on the television at some point during the day, and 32% turn on the radio. Three years earlier, in 2013, these percentages were still 63% and 39% respectively.¹¹⁸ In 2010 the percentage of people turning on the radio was 68%, and in 2005 85%, showing a steady decline in radio usage.¹¹⁹

Anecdotal testimonies from research support these statistics: in Aqcha, Jawzjan, a female respondent observed that *“previously people were interested in radio but now they prefer TV.”*¹²⁰ Her co-discussants agreed stating that *“since TV has come to the community, more people prefer to watch TV as it is more fun than listening to the radio.”*

It is important to note, however, that in Afghanistan television usage does not per se bear an inverse relationship with radio usage. In fact, previous studies have shown that television and radio usage in Afghanistan have at times grown in tandem. Not in the least because radio station growth has been linked to television channel growth with channels often having a radio station also.¹²¹ Both the 2016 Asia Foundation *Survey of the Afghan People* and Sayara's 2016 *Information Ecosystems in Afghanistan* also highlight the enduring importance of radio as a source of trusted information, especially outside of cities and in areas with limited or inconsistent electricity.¹²²

One set of reasons for the persistence of local radio focuses on the obstacles in regard to accessing television. A lack of electricity, necessary for television usage, impedes prolonged television watching. Of the case study regions, only in Badakhshan, Jawzjan, and Kunduz did communities within the broadcast areas of stations have access to the electricity grid. In other provinces, people rely on diesel-fueled generators, the accumulated cost of which can be extensive. In Panjshir, a community elder explains that *“most of the people in my community can only use radio because we do not have*

¹¹⁸ *Afghan Media in 2014*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2014

¹¹⁹ *Afghan Media: Three Years After*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2005; *Afghan Media in 2010*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2014

¹²⁰ FGD Participant (Female, Non-Listeners) in Jawzjan, October 2016

¹²¹ *Afghan Media in 2010*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2010

¹²² *Afghan Information Ecosystems*, report prepared by Sayara, 2016

access to electricity. There are only two hydro-electricity stations that provide electricity from 4pm to 9pm which is not enough for the whole community.”

Buying a TV set, at a very minimum of 3000 AFN, in addition, amounts to a significant investment for rural households with average monthly incomes of ca. \$174 (\$150 in rural areas).¹²³

Improvements in infrastructure and technological innovations, including the increasing presence of solar power systems from China and India, have gone some way in addressing these issues. In Ghor, where the audience survey indicated the rate of TV ownership was 86%¹²⁴ two community elders stated that people made use of solar-powered television sets to watch TV. Another community elder from Panjshir, where the audience survey indicated television ownership was high at 82%, relates that *“at home we watch TV from 5:30pm to 10pm. The electricity is provided by a water system that I have built myself. Electricity is the only issue otherwise people would watch it during the day too.”*

In light of such small-scale advances in alternative energy supplies and media technologies, local radio is in need of affirmative reasons as to why it is likely to serve sizeable audiences in the future also.

First among this is accessibility: radio devices are cheap at an average cost of between 300-1000 AFN and available at just about every bazaar. FM receivers built into mobile phones further facilitate radio usage, especially as mobile phone ownership rates are on the rise.¹²⁵

Secondly, attention should be paid to the overlap that exists between local radio and television - bearing in mind the functional equivalence theory as well as the possibility of different media complementing one another. Establishing the extent of overlap will allow appraisal of whether local radio meets needs that television does not, and whether there is room for local radio to specialize further.

As with national radio, the main roles of television and local radio overlap: they concern information and entertainment. Focus group participants used both media in these regards. Given the necessary capital investments that are involved in starting a TV channel as well as significant running costs, however, television is unlikely to ever be a very localized medium.

That radio and television can complement one another is also attested to by the different peak times for radio and television, which are 6-10pm for television, and 6am-10am and 7-9pm for radio.¹²⁶ Whilst TV is watched mostly in the evenings, radio is listened to during the day, at work, and in the bazaar, as the focus groups also attested. Over half (54%) of the audience survey participants preferred to listen to radio in the morning (32%) and afternoon (22%).

With the introduction of television and its increasingly widespread usage, the way in which local radio is used, for what, and when has changed but local radio does not stand to lose its relevance. Its relevance is changing from the sole or dominant provider of information and entertainment to the dominant provider of local information, local entertainment, local public debate, and local accountability. Radio stations can capitalize on this development by retaining their local focus, explicitly catering to their community's needs, and emphasizing community participation – all of which television stations are less capable of doing.

RADIO AND INTERNET

Access to and usage of internet is a quickly-growing but still marginal phenomenon in rural areas. The 2016 Asia Foundation survey found that 32.6% of respondents in rural areas stated that they live in an area that has access to internet but only 11.2% had personal access to internet, be that by using a mobile phone with internet access or another device. Men were three times as likely to have personal access to internet (17%) as women (5.5%).¹²⁷

¹²³ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by the Asia Foundation, 2015

¹²⁴ Ghor's rate of TV ownership was topped only by Ghazni at 96%.

¹²⁵ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by The Asia Foundation, 2016

¹²⁶ *Afghan Media in 2014*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2014

¹²⁷ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by The Asia Foundation, 2016: 131

As is the case for television, certain factors presently impede widespread usage of internet, especially in rural Afghanistan. The country has a low literacy rate of about 38% of the population.¹²⁸ This means few people can access written sources online. In addition, internet costs can range from 350 AFN for 1 GB mobile internet, to wireless packages of tens to hundreds of dollars. Beginnings were made to roll out a fiber optic network that would allow for faster and less expensive internet connections but the process has been stalled.

In regard to the overlap between local radio and internet, however, internet, unlike television is an equally portable medium that can be accessed anywhere using a smartphone. It can also provide highly localized information on demand through customized RSS feeds and social media. To give an example, the Daikundi local government posts updates on its Facebook page, and Daikundi residents share information in the Facebook group 'My Lovely Daikundi'. Panjshiri songs and music videos can be found on YouTube (with some having been watched over 500,000 times) and sites like Twitter provide public platforms for community discussion and crowdsourced news updates. Internet is as interactive as radio, and perhaps even more so on account of its democratic and participatory nature.

As the extent of overlap between the two media in regard to their ability to meet specific local community needs is great, and internet usage rates are growing rapidly, in the long term internet will provide more of a challenge to the audience sustainability of radio than television.

Recommendation: What conditions are necessary for local radio to retain a sizeable audience share?

- Local radio, however, can capitalize on internet developments, and to some extent is already doing so. The stations already made use of the internet, notably the websites of the BBC and Radio Azadi as well as Facebook, to source information ranging from news to weather forecasts and programming content. In addition, all stations had a Facebook page, an additional platform on which stations can interact with their audience and the wider community off-air, and a valuable resource for gathering feedback. Very few of the stations have launched a website but doing so would be the next logical step for local stations. Websites would provide stations with another platform on which to share content, for example, by posting reports online, as well as the possibility of streaming broadcasts and thus reaching a wider audience. Radio Milma in Paktika, for example, was one of the few stations with a website on which it streamed its broadcasting, reaching expatriate Afghans in India, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.
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RADIO AND PRINTED PRESS

With literacy rates at 38% across the country (52% among men and 24% among women), the offering of print media remains hindered by constraints on the demand side, especially in low literacy provinces such as, for example, Ghor. In addition, access to print media is also limited by poor built infrastructure and insecurity dampening incentives for publishers to distribute print media in the country's more remote areas.¹²⁹

Print media in rural areas can hardly be considered as 'accessible' to rural audiences. In Daikundi, for example, of the 17 local government and private weekly and monthly print publications that once were circulated, not a single one is available today.¹³⁰

CONCLUSION

The ability of local radio stations to retain their audience in the face of increasing competition from other radio stations, both local and national, as well as other media such as printed press, television, and the internet, rests on three factors. First, the station's ability to cater to the needs of the communities in its broadcast area. Second, the station's ability to be inclusive and representative of the communities in its broadcast area. Finally, the station's ability to carve out a niche role for itself in order to minimize functional overlap with other media accessible in its broadcast area.

¹²⁸ CIA Factbook, last updated Oct. 2016. Female literacy rate 2015 estimate for population 15 years and older.

¹²⁹ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by The Asia Foundation, 2016

¹³⁰ Pajhwok: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2015/03/10/several-daikundi-media-outlets-cease-exist> - a lack of budget and poor cooperation from local government in terms of access to information were cited as reasons.

Local radio stations are perfectly positioned to cater to the needs of the communities within their broadcast area given their embeddedness within said communities but are presently not maximizing efforts to collect audience feedback in order to be able to produce highly relevant programming. This lack of effort is rooted in meagre financial resources as well as limited staff capacities. Station managers are, however, aware of the possible value of audience information, both in regard to content production and negotiations with advertisers, and should explore alternative ways of gathering audience feedback and continue to make programming adjustments accordingly.

Local radio stations are equally well positioned to be inclusive and representative of the communities in their broadcast areas, employing local community members, speaking in local languages and using a colloquial lexicon. Stations try to cater to different segments of the community through their programming, and in ethnically and linguistically diverse regions, especially, stations dedicate content to topics that it is hoped will unify different groups. As the 'voice of the people' they are also expected to be both inclusive and representative and an inability to be so can alienate audience segments. This was particularly clear in regard to women's involvement. The inability or unwillingness to hire female staff or broadcast on women's issues alienated female listeners and undermined radio stations' profile as 'the voice of the people'.

Given generally high levels of community participation, representation, and inclusion, local radio has a competitive edge in relation to national media including radio and television which cannot match these same levels. And whilst the roles played by local radio and national radio as well as television overlap, only local stations perform these roles at the local level thus meeting a different set of audience needs. Consequently, local radio does not stand to lose out against these two media. In regard to internet, however, functional overlap with local radio is greater. Levels of access at present, however, are still marginal so that the medium does not form an immediate threat. Internet, in addition, also provides opportunities for local radio to reach a wider audience using a variety of platforms.

Local radio, for now, stands to serve a sizeable audience. As much is dependent on the role of local radio stations in order for them to effectively compete with both national radio and other forms of media in the future, radio stations need to nurture their 'edge' by keeping their focus local and catering to their audience's specific needs. In order to do so, stations need to maximize audience feedback gathering, audience interaction and community participation. This is only possible within limited coverage areas. Stations should consider extending coverage carefully, keeping in mind their ability to still be inclusive of the different constituents of this wider area, and to cover news events throughout. In addition, in order to be able to fulfil their roles successfully, stations need to provide high-quality and reliable news broadcasts and educational programs. This in turn requires both financial resources and staff capacities. Both are, therefore, conditions that need to be met for stations' sustainability in regard to their audience.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Radio remains a primary source of information throughout rural Afghanistan, due to a number of factors (primarily access and preference/habit).
- Community-based radio is able to fill roles national media cannot, reaching individuals in local languages, providing locally-focused information, and obeying localized norms, all of which builds a level of trust and ownership more difficult for national organizations.
- While rural stations have built strong operations in many areas, the facts of the rural Afghan economy mean commercial models are unlikely to succeed on their own, endangering this important resource.
- In the long-term, stations should seek to build community-based funding sources. However, in the short- and medium-terms, donor support will be necessary in order to maintain these stations, as advertising is not by itself a realistic model for many of these stations.

A STRONG ROLE FOR RURAL RADIO

In rural Afghanistan, the types and quantity of media accessible, especially in semi-rural areas such as provincial and district centers, is growing. Note that growth, however, is patchy with many areas remaining under-served. Despite a higher rate of media penetration, specifically of television and to a minor extent internet, radio remains the medium of choice for accessing information in rural environments: FM radio devices are inexpensive, and built into most mobile phones; the sound quality of local radio often better than that of national radio on AM/shortwave; and the language of broadcasting easy to understand.

Radio usage in rural environments has diversified both in terms of the segments within society that listen to radio, the manner in which it is listened to – that is, privately and communally - as well as the times it is listened to. Local radio both drives and responds to this trend, tailoring its programming to cater to the various groups within communities – men, women, the elderly, and youth – and broadcasting up to 24 hours a day in the case of some stations.

As the most accessible medium as well as one that appeals to different groups within society, local radio can reach a true cross-section of rural Afghanistan's population.

Local radio's predominant roles are that of information provider, entertainer, educator, and watchdog. Stations provide communities within their broadcast areas with international, national, and local news as well as information on practical, community-related matters, sourcing content widely with the internet becoming an increasingly important and widely-used resource. As an educator, stations provide interactive program formats that offer listeners engaging learning experiences on topics directly affecting the community and ranging from how to best deal with tourists in Panjshir to the rights of women according to Islam. As a watchdog, local radio bridges the gap between the community and the authorities by raising the voice of the former and demanding accountability from the latter.

The impact of local radio runs parallel to its roles as information provider, educator, and watchdog. Local radio stands out for its ability to pinpoint specific needs within the communities it serves in respect to information and education gaps as well as public grievances, and to address these accordingly. Local radio's impact, therefore, is tailored and effective but remains highly localized.

The ability of local radio stations to retain their audience in the face of increasing competition from other radio stations, both local and national, as well as other media such as printed press, television, and the internet, rests on three factors. First, the station's ability to cater to the needs of the communities in its broadcast area. Second, the station's ability to be inclusive and representative of the communities in its broadcast area. Finally, the station's ability to carve out a niche role for itself in order to minimize functional overlap with other media accessible in its broadcast area.

Local radio stations are perfectly positioned to cater to the needs of the communities within their broadcast area given their embeddedness within said communities but are presently not maximizing efforts to collect audience feedback in order to be able to produce highly relevant programming. This

lack of effort is rooted in meagre financial resources as well as limited staff capacities. Gathering of audience feedback is insufficient and unsystematic, leaving gaps in knowledge that could be leveraged not only in regard to programming but also advertising. Stations do try and take into account what audience feedback they gather be that through personal interaction, calls to the studio or social media.

Local radio stations are equally well positioned to be inclusive and representative of the communities in their broadcast areas, employing local community members, speaking in local languages and using a colloquial lexicon. Stations try to cater to different segments of the community through their programming. This ability, however, for some stations was marred by a lack of women's involvement, alienating female audience members.

Local radio stations play a role within their communities as local information providers, local entertainers, local watchdogs, and as the voice of local civil society, that cannot be replicated by other media accessible to rural communities. Other media either do not have a sufficiently wide reach (print media, internet) in these areas or have a national rather than local focus which precludes them from tailoring their offering to specific localities (national radio, television).

Local radio has carved out a niche for itself that does not compete with national radio or television because it fulfills similar roles but on a local scale and thus answers different needs. These needs are not just about information and entertainment, but about belonging, inclusion, participation, joint efforts, agency, and development. Local radio is therefore likely to serve a sizeable audience in the near future also.

UNCERTAIN INDEPENDENT SUSTAINABILITY

While stations' role and ability to fill this role has grown considerably over the past decade, stations still require assistance given the economic, capacity, and security environments present particularly in rural and semi-rural areas.

Local radio stations' financial sustainability is uncertain within an environment of declining donor funding, economic stagnation, and insecurity. Fewer international organizations engage with local radio for advertising and paid programming, while minimal economic growth and insecurity holds local businesses back from investing in advertising, especially in the highly rural environments where some stations are active and in which commercial activities are already slight. Business development activities on the part of station staff, accordingly, do not always bear fruit with the advertising market quickly exhausted within their limited coverage areas.

Local stations, in addition, face significant costs, notably energy costs. As few stations have consistent access to the electrical grid, most rely on diesel or petrol fueled generators to meet their energy needs, nearly a quarter of monthly expenses for some stations. For Radio Alina in Nuristan, monthly generator costs made up over 70% of total costs.

Local radio stations' access to and exploitation of both human and non-human resources is limited. Human resources concern the skills and diligence of management and staff. In regard to the former, experienced managers were seen to drive business development while their solid reputation within the community facilitated positive public perception of the station. Communities, in general, were quick to discern between managers genuinely interested in serving the community and those seeking self-enrichment.

Staff capacities, however, were in more dire straits. Many stations crippled in this respect relied overly on volunteers. While having volunteers among station staff can contribute positively to a radio station's sustainability because it allows for higher levels of community participation, there are several downsides to over-reliance on volunteerism that negatively impact levels of professionalism, continuity, and knowledge retention, and thus ultimately stations' sustainability prospects. These include volunteers' limited journalism skills and a higher rate of staff turnover as volunteers find paid employment. The latter, in turn, results in trainings being capped at the basics in lieu of long-term capacity building programs. A lack of rigorous recruitment policies and formal training were additional factors that impacted staff capacities.

Regarding non-human resources, access to up-to-date equipment, energy, and transportation were poor. Unstable, unreliable, and expensive electricity was the main reason for stations' limited broadcast hours. A lack of transportation restricted field reporting and news coverage of more remote areas, in turn impacting stations' ability to be inclusive and representative of the different communities in their coverage area.

Information was the one resource stations had increasingly more access to, with the internet, and social media especially, playing an increasingly significant role in this regard. International websites are searched for news, educational content is sourced or verified online, and social media provide stations with localized information as well as an additional platform for community interaction and feedback off-air.

Insecurity impacted almost all local radio stations, be it through targeted physical or verbal attacks, isolated or as parts of larger conflict events. Stations were targeted on account of their role as local watchdogs and as drivers of social change. As a consequence, stations practiced self-censorship, reporters' movements were circumscribed resulting in incomplete and uneven coverage of broadcast areas, and had fewer business development/advertising opportunities.

Stations need political goodwill in order to operate; to access and to verify information, and to ensure some measure of security. At the same time, local radio needs to be politically and editorially independent in order to serve the entirety of the communities within its coverage area, to be inclusive and representative, and to perform their role as local watchdog. As media outlets backed by political groups have recently proliferated, impacting audience's trust of media in general, political independence was also seen to be a major factor driving audience's appreciation of a radio station. Most stations were able to balance political neutrality and unbiased reporting with political goodwill and support networks that facilitate stations' work in terms of gaining access to information, and ensuring the station's and its staff's security.

Community support is of key importance to the sustainability of the stations, and from the outset, stations have made sure to embed themselves within the local community. Community elders were involved in stations' establishment, and local community members make up the station's staff. Community support is further cemented through outreach efforts by station management, perceptions of the station's political independence and its ability to serve as a watchdog as well as interaction with the community both on and off air, and programming that caters to community needs. Community support not only adds a network of security around stations, it also allows stations to push social boundaries, broach sensitive topics, and thus drive social change – but at a rate that does not risk severe community tensions.

Criticism of local radio's programming, both internally and externally produced, is not uncommon, however. Music, and the broadcasting of female voices particularly, elicited disapproval from more conservative elements within society. Stations coped with criticism by adjusting their programming, persevering in their editorial choices, or mediation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community radio plays a crucial role in providing information to rural areas of Afghanistan. While other mediums have increased their coverage in recent years, they cannot fill the same role, as provision of local information requires local presence. This localized information is crucial to creating interest and buy-in for rural communities.

However, the economic realities of Afghanistan today mean that commercial radio is unlikely to be self-sustaining in the near term. While stations should look to further community support, which creates additional ownership and improves the stations' standing with their listeners, sustained donor funding will be crucial to the health of these stations.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Revenues

With economic stagnation, small advertising pools and risk-averse investment attitudes due to persisting insecurity, local commercial environments in Afghanistan at present cannot sustain local radio stations through advertising. Given the current economy, it is impossible that increasing advertising revenues could make up for dwindling donor resources. There is, accordingly, an undeniable need for additional forms of financial support. In the immediate term, this most likely means donor funding.

In the longer term, a new model of community contributions that at present stands unexplored might have the potential to further diversify funding, especially for stations that already rely heavily on donor funding. Despite high levels of poverty in rural Afghanistan, communities indicated their willingness to support their local radio station more concretely. Focus group respondents that did not already support the local radio station expressed their willingness to do so but stated that they were not aware of the types of support the station was in need of or how they could provide the station with support. Types of

support could include donations, fundraising events, membership fees, fees for announcements, fundraising events, or sponsorship.

Sourcing funding from the community, however, requires high levels of community support and buy-in and is highly dependent on the reputation of the station and its management. It would, however, also empower communities with a sense of agency. The challenge in this regard, then, is to impart upon the community that the ultimate responsibility for the local radio station's sustainability lies with them, not with international donors.

Electricity

In order to become more financially sustainable, stations need to secure access to reliable and inexpensive sources of electricity to meet their energy needs. While some stations have come up with creative solutions to meet their energy needs, these are not replicable across the sector and, therefore, not widely sustainable. Installing solar systems would be the most straightforward solution. Panels and batteries can be purchased across the country, and rural Afghanistan is already accustomed to working with them. Salam Watandar has already provided a number of its network stations with solar systems.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Human Resources: Volunteerism

Financial resources are key to diminishing reliance upon volunteers, and stations that pay salaries note higher levels of professionalism and rates of staff retention that allow them to focus on long-term capacity building programs that further incentivize staff to stay.

As most stations have meagre financial resources at their disposal, however, there are other measures that stations could implement outside of paying salaries. Participatory management styles wherein decisions are made in a consultative manner give staff the opportunity to take decisions and ownership of the station's success which could work as a disincentive for volunteers to leave the station. In addition, women are less likely to be looking for paid jobs outside the community, and hence are potential employees who are likely to remain working at a station for longer periods of time.

It should be noted that the challenge facing stations in regard to volunteerism goes to the heart of the model for local radio and its mission, that is, stations need to find a way of balancing their goal of capacity building with professionalism, and without distancing those less skilled or alienating community members. Stations would do well, in this respect, to formulate a clear volunteer policy: a contractual program with a schedule and training mechanisms that volunteers participate in, and after which they are either taken on as paid staff or find a job elsewhere with their enhanced skill-set. A database of ex-volunteers can be drawn up to facilitate future recruitment, or to absorb any gaps in funding on an ad hoc basis.

Combatting disruptions in knowledge transmission due to high turnover rates, Internews has taken measures to make technical trainings last by providing video tutorials on CD. Developing this type of remote learning opportunity should be encouraged: as more stations have access to the internet, such remote learning could take the form of interactive, online modules. Additional measures could include enlisting the community: for example, asking successful business owners from the region to do a voluntary training on marketing, or journalists from the region that have moved to Kabul to host a one-day workshop on a particular topic at a local station.

Non-Human Resources

Station staff are already using the internet increasingly as an information resource that informs news reports and educational content. These efforts could be maximized by trainings on using the internet and social networks efficiently. For example, how to create a survey on Facebook, how to efficiently use search engines, or how to verify or double-check information sourced online. In addition, social media and websites will provide radio stations with additional platforms on which to engage with the community off-air, thus expanding their role as public 'community centers'. Social media and websites add a visual element to on-air reporting, allow for streaming, facilitate feedback gathering, and encourage public discourse.

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

Security

Individual security assessments for each station are warranted given high levels of insecurity. Each outlet operates in different settings, and faces different types of security threats that require different

responses. Efforts to minimize the security risks associated with insurgency take a different shape than those that stem from pervasive violence against women, or localized tribal conflicts.

Following the security assessment, activities per security profile should be developed. These could include fortification, trainings, awareness and outreach campaigns. For example, staff members can be given a basic security training tailored to the specific issues they face. Such trainings could include de-escalation techniques and basic self-defense. Outreach programs to government officials that highlight the vested interest local governments have in functioning local media as a communication channel can help them take stations' security concerns more seriously, which in turn might work as a deterrent in regard to external threats.

Local radio stations should be further encouraged to cement their community networks as a security safety net. The ability of a station to embed itself within the community and foster community ties will provide a measure of protection against different forms of harassment. Stations should ask themselves how community linkages can be strengthened. For example, has a station reached out sufficiently to community elders, communicated to them its security concerns, and asked for their input? Relationships with the religious establishment are also important. As authoritative community members, mullahs have helped start and run stations, their local authority generating wider support for a station.

In addition, stations should be encouraged to coordinate with and join professional networks such as journalist, civil society, or media associations. Such networks bring power in numbers as well as the anonymity of speaking as part of a large group, and might lead to professional synergies. When information, for example, is particularly sensitive, local radio stations can share it between independent outlets and coordinate its release in order to avoid being singled out as a target. Finally, strategic linkages with the donor community can be paramount for ensuring the safety of radio staff members.

Political Goodwill and Independence

The aforementioned professional and community networks also allow stations to stand strong in the face of power, and increase their political sustainability prospects.

In addition, as knowledge is power, station staff need to be acquainted fully with the legal framework protecting them and their activities, for example, the Mass Media Law, the Right to Information Law as well as the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW). The law can be used as leverage when trying to gain access to information. Further sensitizing both station staff and government officials on the content of the relevant legal framework, and the responsibilities of each within it, should facilitate smoother and clarified working relationships between the two.

AUDIENCE SUSTAINABILITY

In order to retain their 'local edge' and ability to provide highly-relevant and tailored information to their audience, stations need to maximize audience feedback gathering, community interaction and participation.

Audience Feedback

Stations recognized the need to better incorporate audience feedback into their decision-making. Stations should receive further training in ways that they can collect, review, and address audience feedback on a regular basis. There are a number of activities stations could undertake in order to solicit audience feedback with minimal expense.

As every station interviewed had a Facebook page, social media provides an opportunity for increasing and systematizing audience feedback that is inexpensive and requires little effort. Facebook allows page and group administrators to design short surveys, and to administer them on their page. While such a survey would target an unrepresentative sample, men with internet access mostly, it would provide a measure of additional information.¹³¹ Station staff can announce the survey on air, and ask listeners to fill out the survey with the female members of their household.

In addition, stations could organize quarterly events for audience members to mingle with station staff, reach out to community elders and other representatives of the community more, and draw

¹³¹ The 2016 Asia Foundation *Survey of the Afghan People* found that 32.6% of respondents in rural areas stated that they live in an area that has access to internet but only 11.2% had personal access to internet, be that by using a mobile phone with internet access or another device. Men were three times as likely to have personal access to internet (17%) as women (5.5%).

increasingly upon their relationships with local CSOs to find out what issues are plaguing the community.

Finally, some stations already hold weekly staff meetings during which audience feedback is collated and discussed. This encourages staff members to systematically keep track of listener requests and community feedback, for example, by noting comments down in a notebook.

In regard to implementing audience feedback, stations would do well to emphasize their responsiveness on air, highlighting changes that have been made in programming and stating explicitly that these were implemented in order to meet audience demands as taking into account the audience's wishes was seen to positively affect perception of the station within the community.

Women's Involvement

Examples of stations that have hired women in the face of initial skepticism and criticism show that perseverance in this respect can bear fruit: most noticed initial resistance from the community against female presenters on the radio. However, they also noted that this resistance was overcome reasonably quickly on account of exposure. Hearing a female voice on the radio became the new normal. In some instances, female presenters have even gathered quite a following.

Stations can facilitate this adaptation process by dedicating some of their educational programs to human and women's rights, especially within the context of Islam. Drawing upon local religious authorities, trusted by the community, and involving community elders as well as other community representatives such as CSO workers in a public discussion can pave the way for actually employing women. Examples, if there are any, of local women that have a solid religious reputation and are publicly active can also be highlighted.

Competition with Other Media

Given the superior resources of national radio stations such as the BBC and Radio Azadi, local radio stations need to capitalize on their local 'edge'. Stations can take inspiration from their national brothers in terms of mission and programming but consistently should translate this to a local level/format. As long as this is the case, and a minimum standard of professionalism and quality is upheld, local and national stations share little functional overlap.

In regard to balancing externally and internally produced programming, this also means that local radio stations should exert caution. While external programming provides them with a high-quality programming basis, it should remain that – a basis upon which stations can build their own locally-tailored programming.

DE-CONFLICTING THE MODEL: COMMERCIAL VERSUS COMMUNITY

The boundaries between community and commercial radio in Afghanistan are blurred at the local level due to a lack of legislation and regulatory framework at the time stations were set up. The Internews/Salam Watandar network consists of a mixture of privately- and community-owned stations. Some are more geared towards community participation while others have gone down the road of more commercial enterprises, with higher degrees of professionalism.

For local radio to retain its competitive 'edge' it might have to choose between a commercial and community model. Stations that are more community-centered than commercial give the community more of a say in programming, and more of a responsibility in keeping the radio financially afloat by donations, membership fees or participation in volunteering programs. Stations that are more commercial than community-centered in turn face fewer requirements of inclusion, participation, and representation. This allows stations to better deal with larger broadcast areas. These, in turn, can generate higher advertising revenues which could help pay for professional staff members.



LOCAL RADIO IN AFGHANISTAN

A SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

ANNEX A: CASE STUDIES OF 10 RADIO STATIONS

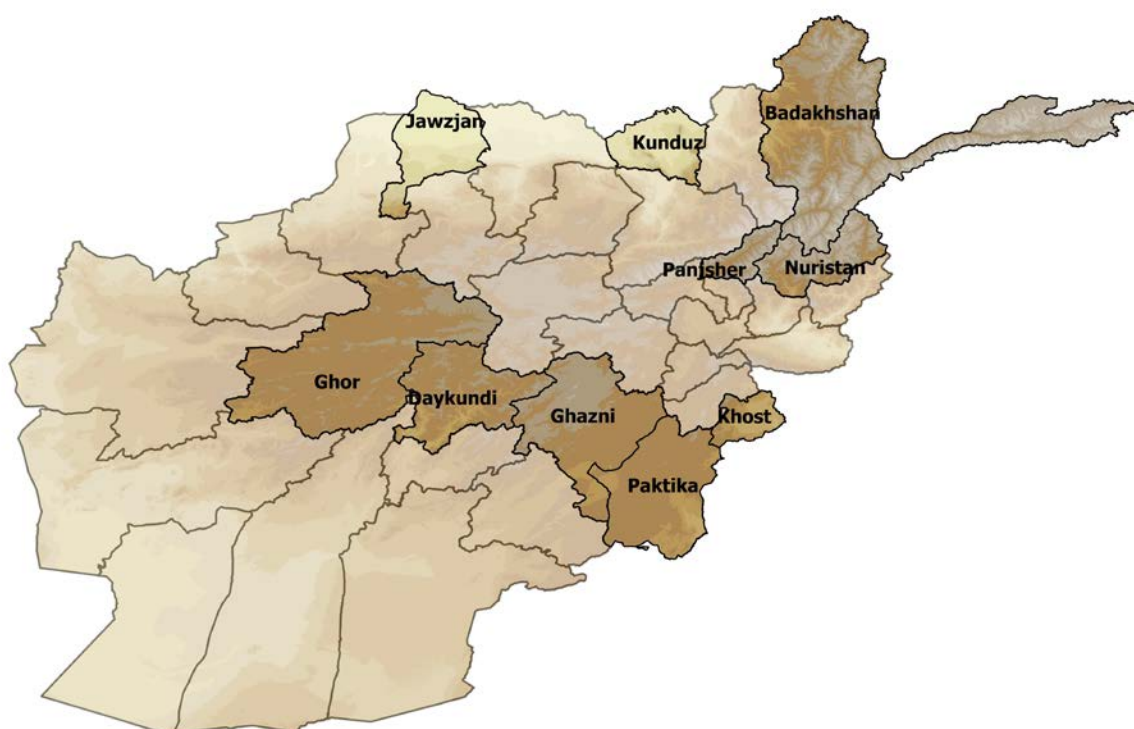


1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the overall study on rural radio sustainability, between October and December of 2016 ten case studies were prepared on local radio stations across Afghanistan. These case studies look at the role, impact, and sustainability of local radio in Afghanistan, presenting the growth of stations from founding to the present day, the relationship between the stations and their communities, the role the stations play in these communities and their corresponding impact, and the challenges stations face in remaining sustainable in the current environment.

All of the ten stations are members of the Salam Watandar network, and were all originally established with the help of Internews. Stations were selected from among 30 who fit this criteria, and were chosen in order to show a range in geography, urban vs rural audience, and involvement of female management and staff.

Figure 11: Map of Afghanistan with case study provinces highlighted



In line with the objectives of the study, stations are presented in order to highlight two critical elements:

- (1) **The role these stations play in ensuring access to information in their communities:** As shown in the main report, despite the growth of other forms of media in Afghanistan, radio still plays a crucial role in building an informed citizenry, particularly but not exclusively in rural areas. These stations are in most cases a trusted source of information with a significant sense of community ownership.
- (2) **The conditions necessary for local radio stations to remain sustainable:** Assuming the above role is valued, the ability of stations to thrive in a changing economic environment must be considered. Stations face a variety of economic, technical, cultural, and security challenges which are highlighted by the case studies below.

Stations are presented in their order of establishment, ranging from 2003 to 2011, and are roughly representative of the characteristics of the 30 stations established by Internews that are a part of the Salam Watandar network.

INTERNEWS AND SALAM WATANDAR

In the years from 2003 to 2011, Internews established 36 local radio stations across 20 provinces in Afghanistan in order to address the lack of independent and localized information production and distribution, especially in rural areas.

Establishment of the first of these radio stations occurred at a time when media was generally distrusted, and the concept of community-based radio foreign to Afghanistan. While the stations initially operated within a media vacuum, they set a precedent and contributed significantly to the subsequent flourishing of the media sector in the country.

In order to ensure minimum standards in the quantity and quality of content broadcast by these radio stations, in 2005 Internews set up Salam Watandar, a Kabul-based production company that produces programs that cover national and international news, issues such as health, education, and rule of law as well as soap operas. Since 2007, these programs have been transmitted by satellite to the network of stations and broadcast locally between the peak hours of 7-9am and 6-8pm.¹³²

In 2012, Salam Watandar became an independent organization. It has since expanded its network from the initial 36 Internews-established stations to include privately-established stations that recognized the appeal of its content and support services. Today, the Salam Watandar network consists of 74 full and limited partner stations.¹³³

List of Internews – Salam Watandar Partner Stations (case study stations highlighted in pink, female-led stations in italics)

#	Station Names	Province	Region	Capital/Provincial/District
1	Radio Amo	Badakhshan	North East	Provincial Center
2	Radio Kishim	Badakhshan	North East	District Center
3	Radio Jurm	Badakhshan	North East	District Center
4	Radio Baharak	Badakhshan	North East	District Center
5	Radio Farhat	Baghlan	East Central	Provincial Center
6	Radio Tiraj Mir	Baghlan	East Central	Provincial Center
7	<i>Radio Rabia Balkhi</i>	<i>Balkh</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>Provincial Center</i>
8	Radio Naw-e Bahar	Balkh	North	Provincial Center
9	Radio Bamyān	Bamyān	Central	Provincial Center
10	Radio Daikundi	Daikundi	Central	Provincial Center
11	Radio Ghaznawyan	Ghazni	East Central	Provincial Center
12	<i>Radio Jaghuri</i>	<i>Ghazni</i>	<i>East Central</i>	<i>District Center</i>
13	Radio Ertibat	Ghazni	East Central	District Center
14	Radio Sada-ye Hadalat	Ghor	Central	Provincial Center
15	Radio Sabawoon	Helmand	Souh	Provincial Center
16	Radio Nedaye Subh	Herat	West Central	District Center
17	Radio Saday Jawan	Herat	West Central	Provincial Center

¹³² Broadcasting times used to be 7-8:30am and 6-7:30pm, this was changed to 7-9am and 6-8pm in 2016.

¹³³ *Vulnerable Radio Stations & Their Sustainability: An Assessment of 10 Vulnerable Radio Stations*, report prepared by Salam Afghanistan Media Organization (Najib Yourish and Zamir Mirzada), 2016: 3 - Note that network affiliation is constantly changing with new stations entering the network whilst others exit.

18	Radio Darman	Jawzjan	North West	District Center
19	Radio Qarabagh	Kabul	East Central	District Center
20	Radio Sulh-e Paigham	Khost	East Central	Provincial Center
21	<i>Radio Zohra</i>	<i>Kunduz</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>Provincial Center</i>
22	Radio Jaihoon	Kunduz	North	District Center
23	Radio Kawoon	Laghman	East Central	Provincial Center
24	Radio Millie Paygham	Logar	East Central	District Center
25	Radio Milma	Paktika	South East	Provincial Center
26	Radio Khorasan	Panshir	Central	Provincial Center
27	Radio Dehrawood	Uruzgan	South East	District Center
28	Radio Alina	Nooristan	East Central	District Center
29	Radio Takharistan	Takhar	North	Provincial Center
30	Radio Yawali Ghag	Wardak	East Central	District Center

These stations cover a broad and largely rural audience, including some of the least accessible areas of Afghanistan, due both to geography as well as security.

Access to information in these areas is often extremely limited. Whilst studies have noted increased media penetration in Afghanistan, these have often focused primarily on urban areas.¹³⁴ Altai Consulting's 2014 report *Afghan Media in 2014*, for example, found that television had become urban Afghans' most important information source. However, with higher levels of education, access, and affluence in urban settings, these findings do not necessarily translate to rural environments. Radio remains a primary information source for many households in rural areas where 75% of the population relies on radio broadcasts in order to meet information needs.¹³⁵ Rural Afghanistan has historically had limited access to information through the media. Low literacy rates, insecurity, and poor infrastructure restrict access to print media, while lack of electricity, limited broadcast areas, and the cost of equipment and subscription services keep television ownership and usage relatively low.

Prior to the introduction of local radio, rural communities relied on national radio stations such as the BBC, and Radio Azadi as well as mosques and councils to meet their information needs. Nowadays, in addition to the different categories of radio, television, and internet as well as to a very small extent print media, according to the Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People rural communities source information from mosques (47.5%), community councils (39%), and by calling people using mobile phones (42.1%).¹³⁶ The latter is facilitated by telecommunications networks now covering 90% of Afghanistan's population, and mobile subscribership having grown significantly.

¹³⁴ *Afghan Media, Three Years After*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2005; *The State of Afghan Media*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2010; *Afghan Media in 2014*, report prepared by Altai Consulting, 2014.

¹³⁵ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by the Asia Foundation, 2016.

¹³⁶ *Survey of the Afghan People*, report prepared by The Asia Foundation, 2016.

2. SADA-YE HADALAT – GHOR PROVINCE

- Founded in 2003, Radio Sada-ye Hadalat is the oldest of the case study stations. It broadcasts out of the center of Ghor province.
- The station broadcasts 24 hours per day and covers 3 out of Ghor's 7 districts with a 300 Watt transmitter.
- Of the case study stations, Sada-ye Hadalat has both the lowest monthly revenues, and costs. The station is almost exclusively (94%) reliant upon donor funding (through paid programming) with a very limited advertising pool active in Ghor.
- Sada-ye Hadalat works in a relatively active media environment with 3 other local station broadcasting in its coverage area.

Figure 12: Female listeners of Radio Sada-ye Hadalat gather to discuss their opinion of the station



Radio Sada-ye Hadalat has broadcast from Ghor Center since 2003. At the time, the station had no local competitors. The local media landscape, however, has since expanded to include two other local radio stations that compete with Sada-ye Hadalat for advertising and paid programming contacts: Feroz Koh and Radio Sarhad, both established in 2014. Despite increased competition Sada-ye Hadalat has thrived – largely due to its reputation as the oldest local radio station. One staff member also mentions the following advantages Sada-ye Hadalat has over the other local stations. Firstly, news is aired every 3 hours. Secondly, the other stations do not have any roundtable programs. Finally, Sada-ye Hadalat is the only station that broadcasts 24 hours.

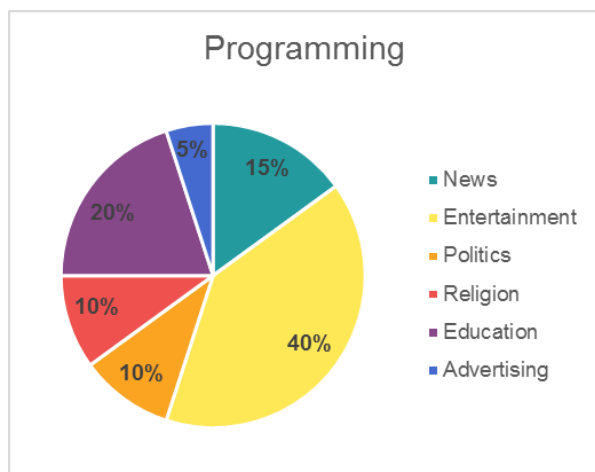
Among the stations examined, Sada-ye Hadalat stands out for its ability to broadcast 24 hours per day, its community support and political independence, as well as its reliance upon a large volunteer workforce and donor funding, and minimal expenditures.

2.1. AUDIENCE: PROGRAMMING & ROLE

Sada-ye Hadalat broadcasts 24 hours per day. Salam Watandar programs are aired from 7-9am and 6-8pm as well as from midnight until early morning. Other externally produced content providers are Equal Access (*Baghcha-ye Sim Sim* – Sesame Street) and Afghanistan Educational Center (*Khana-ye Naw*, *Zendagi Naw* – New Home, New Life). According to station staff, 40% of programming is

geared towards entertainment, 20% towards education, 10% towards religion, another 10% towards politics, 15% towards news, and 5% towards advertising.

The station's most popular programs according to staff are those in which the audience can play an active role. *Balay Nakhair* (Yes or no) is a live program, replicated across Afghanistan, during which listeners call in and speak on air but are not allowed to say either 'yes' or 'no'. According to the station manager, the phone lines are busy for the entire duration of the program. *Sahe wa talash* (Try and seek) is a live quiz program. Participants can win prizes such as notebooks, phone credit scratch cards, or even MP3 players. *Goyanda-ye Bartar* (Best reporter) is a program that allows the audience to take on the role of presenters. Again, the best ones are awarded a small gift. A program that is particularly popular with women is called *Ashpazi* (Cooking). It shares recipes and teaches listeners about the nutritional value of different foods.



The station's impact on the community's access to information, especially local information, has been immediate. Prior to the station's establishment in 2003, community members received news via AM radio stations such as the BBC and Radio Azadi, person-to-person in the bazaar or at the mosque, according to one community elder. Sada-ye Hadalat provides the community with basic information also, such as the telephone number of the local police. In regard to behavioral change, the station manager notes that programs on women's rights and education have encouraged community members to send their daughters to school. The station also performs the role of local watchdog and the program *Mardom wa masoulin* (People and those

responsible) has played a key role in this regard. It is a political program dedicated to resolving community issues during a live roundtable program. A December 2016 roundtable discussed violence against women and security, and hosted representatives of the Women Directorate, CSO members, and a youth association leader. The program takes place 3-4 times per week. It shows Sada-ye Hadalat makes use of its network among civil society and government to bring different voices within the community together. Finally, the station has carved out a role for itself in conflict resolution. Years ago, for example, community members were weary of the presence of Lithuanian PRT forces and protested. The station invited representatives of the PRT and community as well as police for a roundtable discussion to restore consensus.

Key is that Sada-ye Hadalat brings together different parties, whether CSO members, government officials, representatives of foreign forces, or local experts and thus provides the community with a public platform for discussion, information, and resolution. Working closely with other parties, the station is also able to source content from them, creating synergies whereby, for example, CSOs have a communication channel and the station receives first-hand information on happenings in the region.

Focus Box: Community Radio

Sada-ye Hadalat has carved out a niche for itself as the community's radio, not only on account of its coverage of local events but its inclusion of community members as station staff and dedication to solving the problems of the community. Thus "every community member can work for the radio, the radio belongs to the people," says one community elder. "Most people in the community know this station as it has been operative for over a decade. People know the presenters and have their contact numbers." The station is known within its broadcast area as *Radio Delha* (radio heart) not in the least because the radio makes a serious effort to tackle people's problems and facilitate solutions. The station also makes sure to cater to all segments of the community and elders describe it as a "mirror of the people" – there are programs for everyone. Playing such a pivotal role in the community, people as far away as Iran leave messages for their families in Ghor on Radio Sada-ye Hadalat's Facebook page hoping the station reads them out loud during broadcasts.

True to the spirit of community radio, the station encourages audience interaction. And with success, an audience survey conducted with 87 community members in Ghor, including 41 men and 46 women, showed that audience interaction with the station was the highest among all of case studies

with 12% of respondents contacting the station 'often' and a further 61% contacting the station 'sometimes.' When the research team visited the station, someone came to the station to report that his son had been missing for the past four hours. The station manager put together a short report with details of the missing person and aired it after 30 minutes on the radio. Such direct and close interaction indicates the community experiences no barriers approaching the station.

The survey also indicated the station was well known within the community with 66% of respondents regularly listening to Sada-ye Hadalat. Mornings (39%) and afternoons (37%) proved most popular with listeners, 24% preferred the evening.

2.2. SUSTAINABILITY

Revenue Source	Amount	Percentage
Salam Watandar	28,000	80%
Equal Access	5,000	14%
Advertising	2,000	6%
Total	35,000	100%

Radio Sada-ye Hadalat stands out on account of its almost exclusive reliance on Salam Watandar funding for income. 28,000 of the total 35,000 AFN monthly income is provided by Salam Watandar with advertising providing only a small additional revenue stream of 2,000 AFN (down from 3,000 AFN in 2015). Advertisers are small local businesses such as Mohammad Saleem's Barber Shop and Sedaqat Restaurant. Soliciting

advertisements from businesses in the city of Feroz Koh and surroundings is often unsuccessful with many businesses responding that "*the city is small, everyone knows us already.*" In addition, competition with the two other local stations has led to predatory pricing. For example, when UNICEF wanted to air an advertisement, Sada-ye Hadalat bid 100 AFN per minute, Feroz Koh 99 AFN per minute, and Radio Sarhad offered 30 AFN per minute. Such undercutting distorts the market and makes it more difficult for Sada-ye Hadalat to win advertising contracts.

Sada-ye Hadalat equally stands out, however, on account of its minimal costs at 9,700 AFN per month, allowing the station to be financially viable. Not only does it not pay any of its employees a salary (occasionally staff members are provided with small sums of cash to cover urgent expenses), Radio Sada-ye Hadalat has no electricity costs because it has struck an agreement with AWCC: it can use power from the AWCC network tower located about 250 meters from the station free of charge. With no crippling expenses for energy, Sada-ye Hadalat can broadcast 24 hours per day, a creative solution to the problem of insufficient and expensive energy that most stations face. In return, AWCC advertises call rates, sim card services, and internet packages with the station at no cost.

Expenditure	Amount	Percentage
Salaries	0	-
Electricity	0	-
Maintenance	5,000	57%
Internet	1,000	12%
Other	2,700	31%
Total	8,700	100%

Focus Box: Dealing with Electricity

Electricity is a scarce resource. Prior to the agreement with AWCC, the station ran on a diesel generator. Fuel is expensive, and the station could only broadcast 9 hours a day from 7 to 11am and from 3 to 8pm. The agreement with AWCC allows the station to broadcast 24 hours per day, a significant feat for a community radio station which puts it at a significant advantage over other stations within its broadcast area. However, the solution is not a permanent one and leaves the station dependent on AWCC.

Whilst monthly overhead costs are low, the station has made significant capital investments in 2016 with saved money last year. A new transmitter (\$2750), sound mixer (37,000 AFN - \$570), computer (10,000 AFN - \$155) were bought, totaling ca. \$3475 or 225,875 AFN.

Because the station airs 24 hours a day and cannot pay its staff members it relies on a team of 19 part-time volunteers, the largest staff team among the sample stations. Staff members are not professional journalists. This compromises levels of professionalism but allows the station to function as a community radio station. Volunteers investing their time and resources, for example, by using their own motorcycles to access the field, attests to the level of dedication shown by staff members. They are keen to work and this sentiment is palpable by the community. A community member, for example, comments that "*yes, the station does not have expert staff, they do not know about*

reporting professionally but they are hardworking and doing their best, and they are accepted by the people.” It is by thus including the community that the station is able to contribute to its human resource capacities through on the job training. Says one staff member: “I changed a lot. In the beginning I was not able to record or edit programs but now I am able to work independently, collecting and recording, editing and airing. There is a good team spirit, so colleagues have helped me learn the ropes.”

2.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY POSITIVES

- Sada-ye Hadalat displays the true spirit of community radio, it is participatory, inclusive, and responsive, and consequently enjoys great community support. Because of community support, Sada-ye Hadalat enjoys the largest audience share among accessible radio stations in Ghor, and can draw upon a large volunteer work force, both of which bode well for the station’s sustainability.
- Sada-ye Hadalat is one of the few case study stations that is able to broadcast 24 hours a day because it has creatively managed to circumvent electricity issues by coming to an agreement with AWCC. The ability to broadcast 24 hours per day was considered an important pull factor drawing in listeners, and thus also benefits the station’s sustainability prospects.

2.2.2. SUSTAINABILITY NEGATIVES

- Sada-ye Hadalat’s reliance upon a large volunteer force raises questions about the station’s ability to balance community participation and professionalism. It seems, however, looking at community responses that Sada-ye Hadalat manages this balance with support for the station greater than any criticisms about lacking professionalism.
- Sada-ye Hadalat’s reliance upon donor funding through paid programming is a sustainability negative, and the station would do well to try and diversify its income sources. Minimal income also is sustainable as long as Sada-ye Hadalat can keep its cost down, that is, as long as it does not pay salaries and can use AWCC’s electricity.

3. SOL-E PAIGHAM – KHOST PROVINCE

- Founded in 2004, Radio Sol-e Paigham broadcasts out of the center of Khost province
- The station broadcasts 17 hours per day, from 6am to 11pm, covering all of Khost's 13 districts with its 1000 Watt transmitter
- Of the case study stations, Sol-e Paigham works within the most active radio market, with seven other local stations identified
- The station is able to meet 60% of its revenue needs through advertising, and raises 20% of funding from private contributions

Figure 13: Radio Sol-e Paigham's studio



Radio Sol-e Paigham has broadcast from Khost Center since 2004. At the time, the station competed only with the government radio. However, the local media landscape has since expanded to include seven other local radio stations, one of the most robust radio markets among the areas examined. Despite this competition, Sol-e Paigham has thrived, due largely to the reputation it enjoys as the oldest local radio station, and is able to cover 60% of its costs through revenue from local advertising markets.

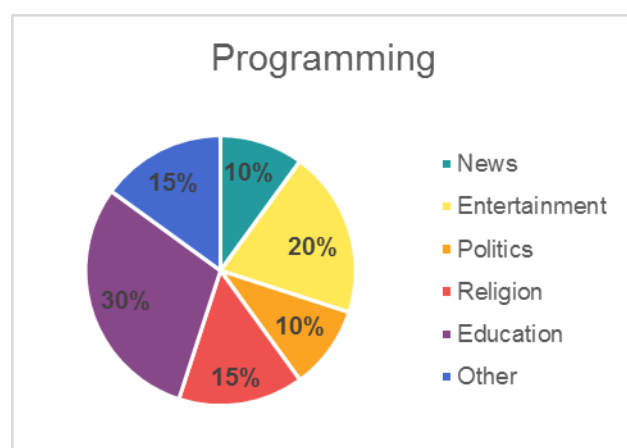
According to the station's manager, it is Sol-e Paigham's *"role to give information to the community about religious, political, economic and cultural issues, and through various programs to prevent community people doing bad things."* Accountability entails an important pillar of the station's role within the community, and the station sees itself acting as a bridge between the government and the community. Says one community elder, *"it gives people the ability to raise their voice."*

Among the stations examined, Sol-e Paigham stands out as potentially being in the best position in the current climate, with a technically-capable full-time staff, a strong position in the local market, and significant revenue from non-donor sources.

3.1. AUDIENCE: PROGRAMMING & ROLE

Sol-e Paigham broadcasts from 6am to 11pm – 17 hours of broadcast daily. According to station staff, this is divided roughly into 20% entertainment, 20% news and politics, 30% educational programming,

15% of religious programming, and 15% other types of programming. Programs on agriculture, technology, health, education, and religion cater to the tastes of different segments of their audience.



The station broadcasts externally-produced programming from both Salam Watandar and the BBC, with the latter providing content on English language education. According to the station manager, external programs are aired that “fit the language of the audience, that add something unique so that there is no repetition, and that are technically sound.” This response shows a higher level of consideration regarding the external content broadcast, with many other stations broadcasting external programs with little consideration of their actual content. Despite this consideration, the station manager acknowledges that at times, external programs have focused on topics that

were in conflict with local norms, creating some tension.

Station staff state that “question-and-answer”-type programs are their most popular, “because the audience is happy when it hears its own voice on the radio.”

Radio Sol-e Paigham is capable of having a strong impact because of its relatively high level of professionalism. A staff member explains: “before airing a report, we make a solid plan about a certain topic, what do we want to find out and tell the people, then we make the program.”

The station’s audience seems to recognize this level of professionalism and its place in the community. According to one community elder interviewed, “this radio is the backbone of our society. If this radio did not provide us with any information we simply would not know.” That is not to say, however, that the station fulfills the role of local information provider comprehensively, and there is demand for a greater level of local information. As one community elder explains “in this area and in every district there is something new every day but unfortunately we do not have more than two or three local reports per day. It would be better if the radio station makes more local information programs and they ask the audience about the situations in their district.”

Focus Box: The Importance of Community and Professional Networks

When it comes to facing insecurity, Radio Sol-e Paigham draws on the support of the community and its network: “if security is not good, we contact elders, local people and the ulema. We also get in touch with the Afghanistan Journalism Association, and share our problem and issues with them,” according to a staff member.

This same network facilitates relevant and authoritative programming. It allows staff members to “invite guests and pundits to our radio station to discuss certain topics. We invite elders, provincial council shura members, and government officials.”

According to another community elder “this radio also plays the role of teacher or instructor.” For example, in the program *Rogh Zan*, doctors are invited to the studio to answer listeners’ questions. A roundtable about dowry resulted in community elders gathering and limiting dowry payments. The impact of Radio Sol-e Paigham on knowledge levels and behavior was echoed by focus group participants. As one female listener stated, “I decided to migrate to a foreign country but when I heard on the radio about the situation for Afghan

migrants, I changed my decision. I decided to continue my education and set some goals for my future about how I can best serve my country.”

The station is well-known within the immediate community. In a survey of 102 randomly-selected households in and around Khost center, including 51 male and 51 female respondents, 68% were aware of the station and considered themselves to be regular listeners.

The station’s staff believe that they pay close attention to their audience’s preferences, and change programs and timing accordingly. Preferences are gauged during consultative meetings in which community members participate. As one staff member commented, “when the station does not take into account the ideas and comments of the community, then people will not listen to the radio programs because people want to hear their voice on the radio, and their favorite song, and they want

to see their questions answered.” The station’s efforts in this regard were recognized by listeners. According to one listener interviewed, “They are broadcasting programs according to people’s preferences and our demand.” In addition, one community elder stated that “I think among the local radio stations people listen to Sol-e Paigham radio because it is a neutral radio station.” Audience comprehension also plays a key role, with audience members stating, “I understand all programs on this radio station because it is in our language and uses simple words.”

3.2. SUSTAINABILITY

Radio Sol-e Paigham has among the highest monthly revenues among the case study stations at 250,000 AFN per month, and these are increasing with new advertising contracts currently being negotiated. Monthly costs are equally significant at 225,000 AFN, but revenues cover these comfortably.

Revenue Source	Amount	Percentage
Advertising	150,000 AFN	60%
Paid Programming	50,000 AFN	20%
Private Contributions	50,000 AFN	20%
Total Revenues	250,000 AFN	100%

Already, advertising makes up 60% of total revenue streams. Sol-e Paigham benefits from the value of advertising being recognized by local businesses. Says the employee of a fashion center that advertises with the station, “advertising is costly but when we started to broadcast our advertisements, the number of

customers increased. Then it no longer is an expense because our customers are growing.” When asked why he chose Radio Sol-e Paigham, the same advertiser stated that it is the oldest local radio station with the largest audience. Sol-e Paigham thus benefits from the relative sophistication of its immediate commercial environment.

The station manager adds to this that “our marketing is good, we print the radio logo on glasses, notebooks and pens, and give these to people, we use Facebook and attend community meetings.” The station manager had received marketing training from Salam Watandar. The station’s top three advertisers are Sayara, Aiwa Mobile, and public health organizations.

With healthy financial accounts, the station is able to pay all of its 9 staff members between 5,000 and 20,000 AFN per month, the latter constituting the highest salary witnessed among case studies. All staff members are employed by the station full-time, and four have Bachelor’s Degrees. Having full-time, paid staff facilitates a level of professionalism that further draws in both audience and advertisers, and thus pays dividends in kind. The station is also dedicated to the human resource capacity building of the local community and the station manager maintains that since 2004, Radio Sol-e Paigham has “trained more than 100 local people as journalists.”

Expenditure	Amount	Percentage
Salaries	110,000	49%
Electricity	50,000	22%
Maintenance	25,000	11%
Programming	20,000	9%
Other	20,000	9%
Total costs	225,000	100%

Focus Box: A Lack of Women’s Involvement

In order to be an inclusive and representative station, management understands that “the presence of female staff is required.” However, they state that they “cannot hire women due to the local culture.”

Attempts at involving women have been marred by local religious leadership. A live program that invited women to the studio to read a poem or sing a song was criticized by the Khost Ulema Council and subsequently pulled off the air. The station deemed solid relationships with the scholars to be of greater importance for the time being than driving change in regard to gender perceptions.

One community elder mused that “they must have a good relationship with the people and community elders because only with the help of them can they make these programs. If they talk with community elders perhaps they can make some programs about women’s rights and hire women as employees, but they need the support of the elders for this.”

3.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY POSITIVES

- Sol-e Paigham's financial sustainability looks promising with healthy financial accounts and 60% of revenues deriving from advertising with room for further growth on account of the station's extensive coverage, its reputation as a professional and well-established local radio station, and the commercial activity of the region.
- Sol-e Paigham dedicates much time to marketing, drawing on community support and professional networks to engage advertisers and drive business development.
- Paid, professional staff and low levels of staff turnover lead to a higher quality of programming which in turn draws in listeners, as does the station's consideration for its audience's preferences and the added value of external programming. More listeners, in turn, attracts advertisers, and thus income.

3.2.2. SUSTAINABILITY NEGATIVES

- Sol-e Paigham does not involve women in any of its internally produced programs, and therefore is not able to be representative or inclusive of the communities it broadcasts to. Women's involvement was a pull-factor for listeners, especially women, many of whom were critical of radio stations that did not engage with women's issues.

4. RADIO ZOHRA – KUNDUZ PROVINCE

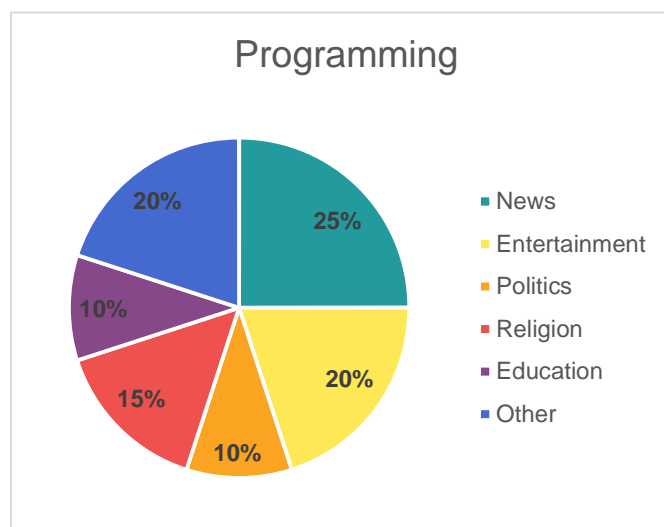
- Founded in 2004, Radio Zohra broadcasts out of Kunduz City in Kunduz Province.
- The station broadcasts around the clock: 24 hours, every day of the week, and covers all of Kunduz' 7 districts, 3 of Takhar's 17 districts, and 2 of Baghlan's 15 districts
- Of the case study stations, Radio Zohra works within one of the more active media markets, with 6 other local stations identified, and 2 local television outlets.
- The station is able to meet 80% of its revenue needs through advertising, and receives the remaining 20% from donor organizations through paid programming.

Radio Zohra was set up in 2004 as the first local radio station within the Internews network dedicated to the capacity building of women. At the time, the station competed only with government radio. Today, however, the media landscape in the city and surroundings has expanded to include several other local radio and television stations. Despite the city's commercial activities suffering from insurgent attacks and insecurity, Radio Zohra still manages to cover significant parts of its cost through local advertising. Ultimately, however, the station's revenues of 90,000 AFN per month fall short of its 116,000 AFN monthly costs. The effects of insecurity upon local businesses being the main reason for diminishing revenues in recent years.

Kunduz has a competitive local media landscape with 6 other local radio stations broadcasting in Radio Zohra's coverage area as well as two local television outlets. Radio Zohra was the first local radio station and has distinguished itself from other local media as a station focused on women. In a survey of 96 randomly selected households in Kunduz, including 44 female and 52 male respondents, 91% knew Radio Zohra and 89% also listened to it. The quality of this station was considered by 61% of respondents to be better than that of other stations. Only 3% found it worse. The most popular time to listen to Zohra was in the morning for 43% of respondents. 34% preferred the afternoon and 23% the evening.

4.1. AUDIENCE: ROLE AND IMPACT

Radio Zohra broadcasts 24 hours per day, starting with 4 hours of Salam Watandar programs between 5-9am. For the rest of the day, a mix of live and recorded programs are aired on topics such as Islam, music, or economics. 2 hours between 6-8pm are once again reserved for Salam Watandar and are followed by a 2-hour long live entertainment program. The nighttime hours between 10pm and 5am are dedicated to *Ahang Hayee dal Nisheen* or 'pleasant songs'.



Radio Zohra thus broadcasts content on a mix of topics, varies live and recorded programs, and balances internal and external programming. A total of 6 hours per day are dedicated to Salam Watandar's programs. With additional programs produced by Equal Access and UNAMA, the final balance between internal and external programming is 50/50. As Radio Zohra broadcast 24 hours a day, 12 hours of internally produced programming daily is significant, and among the highest of the case studies.

With its programming, Radio Zohra, according to the manager, aims "to build the capacity of the community in different fields" and fulfills the key roles of local

radio: it broadcasts information on the political and security station, it airs educational programs

targeting young people such as *Donya-ye Jawanan* (World of the Young), and it encourages government accountability by informing its audience on government activities in programs such as *Tahlel wa Barasi* (Analyze and Evaluate), inviting authorities to the studio to answer questions from listeners. As a station that was set up specifically to promote the rights of women it also works to change attitudes towards women, and encourages women to pursue administrative and civil activities. With 3 out of 6 employees being female, Radio Zohra sets an example.

4.2. SUSTAINABILITY

Revenue Source	Amount	Percentage
Salam Watandar	16,000	17%
Advertisement	74,000	83%
Total Revenues	90,000	100%

Revenues for Radio Zohra have decreased since the start of 2010 because of increasing insecurity, fewer active NGOs, and economic malaise in Kunduz. Today's monthly revenues entail 90,000 AFN of which 83% is generated through advertising, a significant feat given prevalent insecurity in Kunduz.

Private businesses make up 40% of all advertising revenues. The telecom company MTN, for example, is the station's number one advertiser. Airtime is sold for 100AFN per minute and advertisements are usually aired 10 times a day, 2 times during prime-times, and 8 times outside prime-times.¹³⁷ Whilst in most cases, reliance upon advertising bodes well for the financial sustainability of a station, in the case of Kunduz, a city that has twice fallen to the Taliban within the span of 2 years, this source of income is precarious due to the precarious economic effects of insecurity.

Type of Advertiser	Percentage
Private businesses	40%
Public institutions	15%
Military organizations	20%
NGOs	25%

Costs	Amount	Percentage
Salaries	65,000	56%
Electricity	28,000	24%
Maintenance	10,000	9%
Programs	5,000	4%
Other	8,000	7%
Total Costs	116,000	100%

Focus Box: Advertising with Radio Zohra

A local manufacturer of lubricants has been advertising with Radio Zohra for the last 6 months. Contact was initiated when a representative of Radio Zohra came to his office in 2010 and provided information about the radio station. The advertiser sees Radio Zohra's relative value in terms of its ability to offer competitive pricing as well as its coverage and sound quality. The company's advertisement airs 21 times a day for 2,300 AFN per month.

Focus Box: Insecurity and Financial Sustainability

Insecurity poses one of the most significant threats facing the sustainability of Radio Zohra. With Kunduz city falling into the hands of the Taliban twice within the span of two years, the local economy has been devastated, a flight of capital and human resources has taken place, and a generally risk-averse attitude of local businesses prevails. National companies are also less inclined to invest in the region. Insecurity has not only thus affected Radio Zohra's revenue potential but also the scope of its activities. Capable staff members have fled the city and many areas are inaccessible, rendering field reporting impossible. If insecurity persists or flares up again, the station manager fears the station's broadcasting will have to cease.

The station's owner and former manager from Kunduz left the city after the Taliban attacked it for a second time in September 2016. The deputizing manager and a technician are the only full time staff members. The other 4 staff members work part-time. All are paid between 5,000 and 7,000 AFN per month, and 3 out of the 6 employees are women. Although all staff members have at least past the 12th grade, with two employees having a Bachelor's Degree, levels of professionalism are poor. One staff member explains that "*during one entertainment program the presenter was heard whispering*

¹³⁷ Prime-times are 7-9AM, 11AM-12PM, 2-3PM, and 8-10PM.

and laughing during songs. People objected and presenters were told not to whisper or laugh during songs, or to ask private information from audience members that call in.”

A lack of professionalism and technical skills affects the capacity of staff to deal with equipment. After Kunduz fell to the Taliban in 2015, the station was looted and all its equipment was stolen. GIZ provided Radio Zohra with a 300 Watt transmitter. After 3 months of usage, however, the power supply of the transmitter was damaged and it could not be repaired in Kunduz. It was sent to GIZ for repairing in Kabul and is yet to return to Kunduz. The incident, however, also attests to the importance of ties with international organizations in times of crisis. Note also that Salam Watandar has helped station staff to flee from Kunduz to Kabul when the city once more came under attack from the Taliban.

4.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY POSITIVES

- The fact that Radio Zohra has managed to generate 80% of its revenues from advertising, of which 40% is from local, private businesses, despite the economic malaise is impressive, bearing in mind also that Kunduz provided the most competitive landscape for local media among the case studies with at least 6 other local radio stations active and an accordingly savvy audience. This bodes well for Radio Zohra’s financial sustainability prospects, especially if the security and economic situation in the region improves. Radio Zohra is the oldest among the local radio stations, and has good coverage, positioning it well to further attract advertisers.
- Radio Zohra’s focus on women’s issues gives means it occupies a niche among the other local media outlet. In order to build its identify further niche programming on women’s issues will further differentiate the station from others.

4.2.2. SUSTAINABILITY NEGATIVES

- Radio Zohra attests to the crippling effects of insecurity upon local radio stations, both in terms of the personal safety of staff members and the viability of the local economy and advertising opportunities. As long as insecurity reigns, international funding for Radio Zohra is crucial.
- Lack of staff’s professionalism will negatively impact Radio Zohra’s sustainability prospects as professional and capable staff is all the more necessary in a competitive local media environment like Kunduz in order both to draw in audience, and advertisers. Radio Zohra’s focus on the capacity building of the female workforce is important in a country where women’s participation in public life is limited but it needs to be balanced with attention to staff professionalism.

5. RADIO JAGHURI – GHAZNI PROVINCE

- Founded in 2005, Radio Jaghuri broadcasts out of Jaghuri district in Ghazni province.
- The station broadcasts 10 hours per day, from 7 to 11am, and from 4 to 8pm, covering 2 of Ghazni's 19 districts with its 300 Watt transmitter. Of the case study stations, Radio Jaghuri broadcasts the fewest hours.
- Radio Jaghuri is the only local radio station within its broadcast area.
- The station relies almost entirely on donor funding, including paid programming, to meet its revenue needs. Only 10% of income is generated through advertising.

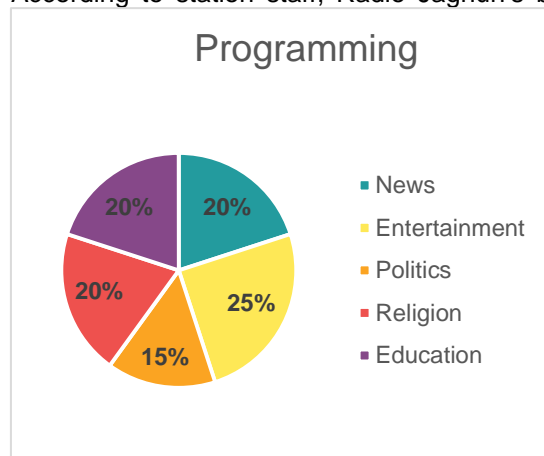
Radio Jaghuri has broadcast from Jaghuri district since 2005. For 12 years now, the station has been the only local media outlet within this district of Ghazni province competing only with government radio and international outlets such as the BBC, and Radio Azadi.

Among the stations examined, Radio Jaghuri stands out for the minimal amount of internally produced programming. 75%, or 7.5 hours of the daily 10 hour broadcast, is produced externally, all by Salam Watandar. Only 2.5 hours are produced internally. According to one staff member, this is *“because Radio Jaghuri lacks the human resource and financial capacity to produce sufficient programs.”* This limits the ability of Radio Jaghuri to be a truly local radio, tailoring programming to community needs. In addition, the local, Dari-speaking audience in Jaghuri has complained about some of Salam Watandar's programming being in Pashto. According to one staff member: *“we all the time broadcast Salam Watandar programs which is decried by our audience because some of Salam Watandar's programs are in Pashto.”*

5.1. AUDIENCE: PROGRAMMING & ROLE

Despite limited internally produced broadcasts, as the only local radio station in the region, Radio Jaghuri is well-known. In a survey of 92 randomly-selected households in Jaghuri and Ghazni center, including 51 male and 42 female respondents, of those who used radio (43%), all (100%) knew Radio Jaghuri, and almost all (97.5%) listened to the station. The morning was the time during which most 82% preferred to tune in. None listened in the evening as Radio Jaghuri stops broadcasting at 8pm.

According to station staff, Radio Jaghuri's broadcasts for a quarter are made up of entertainment



programs. News, education, and religion each make up another 20% of programming. The remaining 40% is dedicated to entertainment (25%) and political content (15%). As the only local radio station, it has increased access to information for its audience by reporting on local news including security issues, and highlighting issues that the local government is facing. Audience members indicated they previously relied upon the BBC and Radio Azadi for national news, and informal channels of information such as mosques and village councils for local information.

Radio Jaghuri's behavioral impact upon its listeners comes about mainly on account of Salam Watandar programming. Male listeners relayed personal stories during focus group discussions: *“I learnt about the*

disadvantages of narcotics and stopped using them,” said one. Another stated: *“I understand the value of education and now I am studying.”*

Jaghuri's potential for increasing access to information and social impact is presently not maximized on account of its limited broadcast hours and staff capacities. As one staff member explains: *“our radio cannot compare with them [BBC and Azadi] because we are a little weak.”* FGD participants and respondents to the audience survey also described the station as weak and its staff as incompetent: the station did not pay sufficient attention to people's problems, did not maximize its role as a

watchdog, and did not broadcast enough programs on a range of topics such as health, childrearing, and education. Perhaps such grievances lie behind the fact that Radio Jaghuri stood out in regard to the proportion of audience survey respondents (75%) that ‘never’ contacted the station. This was the highest among the case studies.

FGD participants that did not listen to Radio Jaghuri, accordingly, preferred the BBC and Radio Azadi because of their good coverage, attention to women’s rights, the skill of their staff, and the fact that they broadcast 24 hours a day. Programs were considered to be more innovative and addressing people’s problems. Their only dislike was that neither the BBC or Radio Azadi broadcast in the Hazaragi language.

5.2. SUSTAINABILITY

Radio Jaghuri relies almost entirely on the monthly 28,000 AFN stipend from Salam Watandar to meet its revenue needs. It makes up 90% of its total monthly revenues of 31,000 AFN. These are also the lowest total monthly revenues among the case study stations. Such reliance upon donor funding and lack of diversification of funding sources does not bode well for the station’s financial sustainability.

Revenue Source	Amount	Percentage
Salam Watandar	28,000	90%
Advertising	3,000	10%
Total Revenues	31,000	100%

Expenditure	Amount	Percentage
Salaries	18,000	51%
Electricity	10,000	29%
Maintenance	5,000	14%
Other	2,000	6%
Total	35,000	100%

Revenues, moreover, do not cover the total monthly costs of 35,000 AFN. Salaries are the biggest expense post and at 18,000 AFN per month make up over half of the total monthly costs. Salaries, in addition, are only paid to 2 of the station’s 5 staff members. Another presenter, the deputy manager, and station manager work on a voluntary basis. Whilst their volunteering absorbs gaps in funding, audience members have expressed concern about the limited professional skill-set of staff members in both FGDs and the audience survey.

Radio Jaghuri currently only generates 10% of its income through advertising. This total of 3,000 AFN per month is derived from contracts with local businesses mainly. Business development is only minimally pursued by the station despite Jaghuri being among the most affluent districts within Ghazni province, and efforts should be increased to improve the station’s sustainability prospects.

Focus Box: Advertising with Radio Jaghuri

A local pharmaceutical company and shoe production company that advertise with Radio Jaghuri relayed prices can be negotiated and adjusted as needed. Both considered Radio Jaghuri not to be very professional and found the skills of staff members to be low. The station, however, is the only one in the region, its advertising rates are low, and because people in the district listen to it good for attracting a local audience. Both companies pay 1,500 AFN per week. Their advertisements are prepared by advertising agencies and Radio Jaghuri only broadcasts them.

Despite the station being a so-called ‘women’s station’ and employing two women, one of which is the station manager, female FGD participants complained the station did not pay sufficient attention to women’s issues. Focus on women’s issues, however, would allow Radio Jaghuri to build an identity for itself. For a station that broadcasts largely Salam Watandar content, a distinct brand identity is all the more important.

The station manager took over from her husband after he passed away in 2012. Over the last four years, she has held responsibility for programming decisions, report checking, radio licensing, salary distribution, relations with Salam Watandar, and the preparation of technical reports and letters. She is based in Kabul and has not been in Jaghuri for 2 years on account of security concerns. An employee of the station since 2005 deputizes in the station manager’s absence.

Radio Jaghuri testifies to the fact that relationships with powerful people can help to ensure the smooth running of a local radio station. If the station’s generator faces problems, for example, the

local government directorate gives the station access to the governmental electricity grid. Wealthy community members also at times donate generator fuel. Such in-kind contributions were not uncommon among listeners according to FGD participants.

5.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY POSITIVES

- Radio Jaghuri is the only local radio station accessible within its broadcast area and thus benefits from a natural audience.
- Good community networks and relationships with wealthy community members help Jaghuri when electricity or funds are scarce. Radio Jaghuri would do well to further exploit these relationships, especially with women's CSOs that would help the station consolidate its identity as a women's station.

5.2.2. SUSTAINABILITY NEGATIVES

- 75% (or 7.5 hours of the daily total of 10 hours) of Jaghuri's broadcasting is filled by Salam Watandar programs, the highest proportion among the case studies. A lack of internal programming negatively affects the ability of Radio Jaghuri to play a niche role within the community as a local information provider, teacher, and watchdog, and accordingly its added value in relation to accessible national media.
- Community members perceived Radio Jaghuri generally as weak, not professional, with irregular broadcasting hours, and not enough attention to people's problems and women's issues.
- Jaghuri performs relatively poorly generating revenues and developing the business through marketing, consequently its income is minimal and does not cover monthly costs.
- Listeners complained about Jaghuri not giving sufficient attention to women's issues. For a station that self-identifies as a women's station, this is an issue and Jaghuri would do well to return to its mission of a women's station. To do so, however, it will need to proportionally produce more programs internally so that these can be dedicated to this topic.
- The high rate of television ownership and usage that was noted by the audience survey poses a threat to Radio Jaghuri's listenership according to staff members. Says one: *"television and internet have caused a big decrease in our listenership."* And a community elder observed that *"internet is now the most popular medium providing solutions to people's problems."* Jaghuri has the highest rate of television ownership with 96% of respondents stating they have a TV at home, and 62% of respondents watching every day. This whilst radio usage was relatively low: 86% of respondents had a radio at home but 57% of respondents said they 'never' listen to the radio. Only a very small percentage listened to the radio often (1%) or everyday (3%).

6. RADIO DAIKUNDI – DAIKUNDI PROVINCE

- Founded in 2005, Radio Daikundi broadcasts out of Nilli City, the capital of Daikundi province.
- The station broadcasts 12 hours per day, from 6 to 10am, and from 2 to 10pm, covering 4 out of Daikundi's 8 districts.
- Radio Daikundi is part of a relatively vibrant local media landscape with two other local radio stations active within its broadcast area.
- The station meets 85% of its revenue needs through donor funding. Only 15% of revenues are generated through advertising.

Figure 14: Radio Daikundi

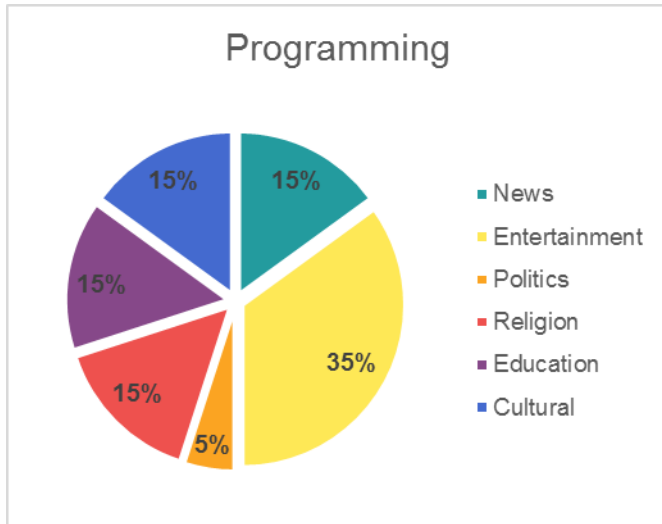


Radio Daikundi has broadcast from Nili City since 2005. At the time the station was the only local media outlet within the province. The media landscape since then, however, has expanded to include 2 other local radio stations broadcasting from Nili City: Radio Aftab and Radio Nasim. Despite this competition, Radio Daikundi has thrived, due largely to the reputation it enjoys as an politically independent station, and the oldest of the local radio stations.

Among the case study stations, Radio Daikundi stands out for its high level of women's involvement, with women involvement only matched by the two stations that are dedicated to women's issues: Radio Zohra, and Radio Jaghuri. It also has one of the highest monthly revenue deficits among the case study stations.

6.1. AUDIENCE: PROGRAMMING & ROLE

Radio Daikundi broadcasts from 6 to 10am, and from 2 to 10pm – 12 hours of broadcast daily. According to station staff, this is divided roughly into 35% entertainment, 15% of news, cultural programs, educational programs, and religious programs, and 5% of political content. Programs on women's issues (*Zan wa zendagi* - Woman and life), contemporary politics (*Nobat shema* - Your turn), health (*Sahat dar zindagi* - Health in life), and pedagogy (*Hoqoq Kodak az deed gha Islam* - Children's rights from the Islamic perspective) target and cater to all segments of the population in Daikundi.



The station broadcasts externally produced programming from Salam Watandar, which makes up 50% or 6 hours daily, of total programming.

Radio Daikundi plays a number of roles. Firstly, it provides information, including local, national, and international news, security incidents and government announcements. Secondly, the station tries to hold the local government accountable. It covers topics such as the torturing of detainees by the police, and the government’s failings when it comes to disaster response and ensuring security within the province. Radio Daikundi creatively uses irony and parody reports to deal with such politically sensitive subjects.

The station’s role as watchdog is not limited to the government only. One staff member, for example, broadcast a report about a local medical organization that was deemed substandard. The organization has since vowed to make improvements. Linked to the role of watchdog is that of the voice of civil society: *“people are voicing their concerns through Radio Daikundi, conveying their messages to the government,”* says one community elder.

The station performs these roles with success. The community clearly relies on the station for providing basic information such as prayer times. A staff member relayed that *“when the time for prayer was skipped one day, the studio received a call some minutes after it was due from the mullah of a local mosque asking why it had not been announced.”* Before the station was established the only sources of information were AM stations such as the BBC, Radio Azadi, and Radio Mashad from Iran. Accordingly, *“before local radio we were not aware of Daikundi incidents and news, now we are because of province news and reports,”* says one FGD participant. In driving social change, staff members state that community members are presently encouraging their daughters to pursue an education on account of Radio Daikundi’s programming on women’s issues and cultural practices including underage marriage, dowries, and violence against women.

The station is well-known within the immediate community. In a survey of 96 randomly-selected households in and around Nili City, including 46 male and 50 female respondents, 80% were aware of the station and considered themselves to be regular listeners, albeit only in the evenings. In addition, participants of FGDs that did not listen to Radio Daikundi were people that did not have access to radio at all: everyone with radio access listened to Radio Daikundi. 70% of respondents also regularly interacted with the station, one of the highest rate among the case studies.

In regard to the audience’s preferences among the local radio stations, Radio Daikundi stood out as most popular on account of its reputation for political independence, and its status as the oldest of local radio stations: it was often referred to as Radio Reja, Reja being a famous local doctor who worked at the station. After Radio Daikundi, Radio Nasim was appreciated by audience survey respondents. Aftab Radio was inactive during the fieldwork period due to technical problems. Radio Afghanistan, government-owned, is considered to be biased. Community members listen to it but do not take its broadcasting at face value. Community elders stated that *“TV and internet are both attracting more users. Radio, however, remains the main source of information at the local level, reporting incidents all across Daikundi as well as funeral announcements.”*

6.2. SUSTAINABILITY

Revenue Source	Amount	Percentage
Salam Watandar	28,000	70%
Human Rights Office Programming	6,000	15%
Advertising	6,000	15%

Radio Daikundi has one of the highest monthly revenue deficits among the case study stations with 40,000 AFN monthly incomes, and 77,000 AFN monthly expenditures, leaving a 37,000 AFN monthly deficit. This deficit is due in part to Radio Daikundi adjusting to scarcer revenue streams as total revenues have decrease significantly over the course of the past 5 years: from 100,000 AFN in 2011 to 40,000 AFN today.

Total	40,000	100%
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Focus Box: Advertising with Radio Daikundi

Dealings for advertisements are conducted on the basis of case-by-case negotiation. A religious tourism company which recently started an advertisement with Radio Daikundi, aired 2 to 3 times every evening for a minute, for example, negotiated down the price from 12,000 AFN to 8,000 AFN per month.

Advertisements are generally appreciated by Radio Daikundi's audience. "By airing business advertisements," says one community elder, "radio helps the province to develop economically. Local businesses have a good impact on the economy by making consumers aware." This points to a role for local radio as a catalyst for local commercial activities and an aid to local economic development.

There are three primary reasons for this decrease. Whereas Radio Daikundi used to be the only local radio station in the province, thus naturally attracting all advertising from international organizations as well as the provincial governor's office, two other local radio stations have since been established in the region. Secondly, many international organizations ceased or at least diminished their activities within the province. Meanwhile, local businesses are advertising only minimally. A lack of knowledge in regard to the value of advertising among the business owners as well as the economic downturn are deemed the two main culprits in this regard. To generate some additional revenue, Radio Daikundi airs funeral and other announcements in exchange for a fee of 500 AFN per announcement.

As a consequence of the persistent monthly shortfall of 37,000 AFN, 220,000 AFN in staff salaries are outstanding. In other words, with 40,000 AFN budgeted monthly for staff salaries, staff has not been paid for almost 6 months). 50,000 AFN of fuel, and 12,000 AFN for internet also still needs to be paid. This leaves the station with a total of 282,000 AFN or \$4,340 of outstanding debit. Such significant debt is worrisome in regard to the station's prospect for financial sustainability. Even if Radio Daikundi is able in the immediate term to break-even and match revenues and costs, it will require surplus income for the station to start paying its creditors. Given the current commercial and advertising climate in Daikundi, this seems unlikely.

Expenditure	Amount	Percentage
Salaries	40,000	52%
Electricity (fuel for generator)	15,000	19%
Food staff	15,000	19%
Equipment maintenance	5,000	7%
Internet	2,000	3%
Total	77,000	100%

In addition, forcing staff members to effectively work as volunteers might jeopardize their position with Radio Daikundi. As one staff member explains: "if I find a higher salary in another office, I will leave the station." A total of 9 people work for the station, of which 4 work full-time, 5 are part-time volunteers, and 2 are women. Radio Daikundi stood out on account of its involvement of women, and the relative freedom they enjoyed as reporters and presenters. With only stations that are dedicated to women's issues – Radio Zohra and Radio Jaghuri – employing an equal or larger proportion of women.

Focus Box: A Female Staff Member's Profile

Mahsooma is a full-time employee of Radio Daikundi, working from 8am to 10pm for 4,000 AFN per month for the last three years. She joined Radio Daikundi after a job competition, having passed both written and oral exams, and a 6 week long probation period. She is now responsible for producing reports, hosting live shows including roundtables on religion and a children's entertainment program. Every day, upon arriving at the station at 8am, she has a meeting with the manager, then goes out into the field to source reports. She returns before lunch to edit these. She is back in the field until 4pm. From 5pm until 10pm she hosts shows. FGD participants commented on her as a well-known and well-loved host. As a woman, however, she at times experiences difficulty accessing the field but manages on account of community support: "people in the community know us and each staff

member has become famous in Daikundi city where this station has coverage.”

Insecurity is a major concern for Radio Daikundi. In insecure areas, affiliation with political power brokers who can provide a measure of protection may seem appealing. Radio Daikundi's station manager, however, prides himself on the station's political independence: when a former Daikundi province governor offered to protect the station and to pay the station a monthly stipend of \$1,000, the station manager firmly rejected the offer. Its reputation of political independence, has endeared the station with the community.

Focus Box: Local Radio Under Attack

A local radio station and competitor of Radio Daikundi, Radio Nasim in Nili City, was the target of an attack in October of this year. The house of Radio Nasim's station manager was attacked with hand grenades, the manager himself was beaten and his family threatened. A few hours later, a bomb exploded at the site of the station. It is unclear who is behind the attack and what motivated the perpetrators.

6.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY POSITIVES

- Radio Daikundi enjoys great community support as the oldest among the local radio stations, and is well-known for its political independence, as such it is able to stay ahead of growing competition.
- The station is exemplary for its involvement of women, some of whom have grown into well-known presenters.

6.2.2. SUSTAINABILITY NEGATIVES

- Radio Daikundi's significant monthly revenue shortfall threatens financial sustainability of the station. The station faces challenges with over \$4,000 in outstanding payments and revenues just over half of monthly costs. An increasingly competitive market, with two other local radio stations active in recent years, will only further strain the station's financial sustainability.
- Minimal advertising revenues and a poor advertising market in Daikundi leave little potential for generating further advertising revenues.
- Insecurity is an additional threat as shown by the attack on a competitor local radio station this year.

7. RADIO KHORASAN – PANJSHIR PROVINCE

- Founded in 2006, Radio Khorasan broadcasts out of Bazarak in Panjshir Province.
- The station broadcasts 14 hours a day from 7am to 4pm and from 6pm to 10pm. Khorasan covers 4 out of Panjshir's 7 districts with a 300 Watt transmitter.
- Radio Khorasan is the only local radio station accessible within its broadcast area.
- Despite significant financial difficulties in 2008, leading to the temporary shut-down of the station, Khorasan is now able to generate 70% of its income from advertising.
- Total revenues, however, do not cover the station's monthly expenses and the station currently relies on volunteers to absorb this persistent shortfall.

Figure 15: The team at Radio Khorasan



Radio Khorasan has broadcast from Bazarak from 2006 to 2008, and from 2013 to the present day. In 2008, when the US-led provincial reconstruction team (PRT) left, Khorasan saw its revenues dwindle as the PRT had previously provided the station with paid programming. Khorasan cut its staff members from 13 to 3 but eventually suspended broadcasting. It was not until 2013 that the radio started broadcasting with investments from current staff members but “*we have not been able to get back to the level that we need to be at,*” according to one staff member. It is presently the only local radio station in Panjshir.

7.1. AUDIENCE: PROGRAMMING & ROLE

Khorasan broadcasts from 7am to 4pm, and from 6pm to 10pm – 14 hours of broadcast daily. According to station staff and community elders, the most popular programs are *Darecha-ye sobh* (Morning Window), a live program aired every morning during which Panjshir government officials answer listeners' questions. Second is *Entekhab-e shenawenda*, (Listeners' Choice), a daily program playing songs requested by the audience. Finally, in *Tajali*, (Lightning) a mullah responds to the answers of listeners. “*These are not just my favorite programs, these are the types of programs a lot of people listen to. I have heard people talk about them by the river, or in the gardens, or in houses where we meet from time to time,*” says one community elder.

Each of these programs has a highly interactive format, engaging listeners, and Khorasan tries to dedicate content to pressing or popular local subject matters. Every year, for example, the Panjshir government names the year in honor of a subject such as education. All organizations and government offices try and raise awareness around this subject. As 2015 was the Year of Gardens, Radio Khorasan dedicated a lot of programs to agricultural topics, for example, how to use small spaces for effective gardening, and how to use chemicals.

Such a high level of responsiveness is also reflected in Khorasan's focus. When providing information, the station focuses on local news because *"the priority is to know more about Panjshir because television and other radio stations already cover national events,"* according to community elders. Staff members agree: *"People want to know why the Panjshir municipality is not emptying dustbins, what the municipality is doing to keep the city clean."* Local news coverage, therefore, includes everyday content such as job announcements from line ministries, the opening of schools, and development programs in the province. The station's efforts have contributed to increased access to information, are noticed by the audience - says one community elder: *"people are satisfied with the radio's local and national coverage, they even get live reports when something big happens. Before there was the BBC and Azadi, and people talked via phone. In mosques people would share information or a family member from another province would come and share news. Now Radio Khorasan provides a reliable channel of local news and information."*

7.2. SUSTAINABILITY

Radio Khorasan is among the case study stations whose revenues fall short of monthly costs. With revenues totaling 46,000 AFN per month and costs 70,000, this shortfall of 24,000 AFN is significant. Consequently, Khorasan has not been able to pay the salaries of any of its 6 employees for over a year. Each, effectively, works as a volunteer.

Revenue Source	Amount	Percentage
Advertisement	28,000	61%
Paid programming (Equal Access)	4,000	9%
Salam Watandar	14,000	30%
Total	46,000	100%

Expenditure	Amount	Percentage
Salaries	40,000	58%
Electricity	10,000	14%
Maintenance	10,000	14%
Food	5,000	7%
Communication	5,000	7%
Total	70,000	100%

As salaries total 40,000 AFN per month or 57% of total costs, this measure goes a long way in keeping the station afloat in the immediate future, although the lack of salaries raises sustainability concerns in regard to the ability of staff members to continue working for the station as well as their dedication. One of the reasons of the revenue shortfall is the drop in revenues when Salam Watandar cut Khorasan's stipend from 28,000 AFN per month to 14,000 AFN because the radio was not performing up to standard. The proportion of income that is generated through advertising consequently also rose to 63%. MTN is the station's number one advertiser.

Focus Box: Local Experts and Respected Community Members

Khorasan involved influential community members in its establishment in 2006, and has continued to work with local experts and community members on niche educational topics. A mullah, for example, is employed on a part-time basis and comes into the station 3 or 4 days a week for an hour, the duration of the *Tajali* program that he hosts. During the show, he discusses a topic deemed pertinent and answers listeners' questions. A recent episode was dedicated to ways in which the local community could deal with tourists visiting the valley, hospitality, and cleanliness. He is considered a scholar, having finished 14th grade and attended university. He uses Islamic books and discussions with other mullahs to gather content and to cross-check information. As a part-timer he also manages a local Madrassah. The mullah sees it as his obligation as a Muslim to facilitate learning and pass on knowledge. By drawing upon well-respected community members and local authorities, Khorasan gives weight to its programming and amplifies the impact of its content.

Whereas Khorasan now enjoys widespread community support, a key contributing factor to sustainability, when the station first started broadcasting in 2006 community members asked the radio to not play music as elders feared it would change the mind of young people. Over the years, however, and with increased exposure to a variety of on-air content, such criticisms have dissipated. Radio Khorasan shows that with the introduction of new media, different types of content and information, a process of habituation takes place. According to a community elder, *“anything that comes to a community new, especially media, will be criticized. But now that people have used the media, they know that it is good.”*

In order to keep strong ties with the community, Khorasan is careful about the external programming that it broadcasts. Overall, 75% of programming is produced internally whilst 25% is produced externally by Salam Watandar, UNAMA, and Equal Access. Recently, for example, a rule of law program produced by UNAMA by the name of *Adalat wa Hakemyat* dealt with the topic of divorce. Station staff considered this subject-matter to be too sensitive and did not air the program. Khorasan has since discussed with UNAMA possible ways of dealing with such issues, suggesting it could edit certain parts of shows, or receive alternative programming.

Ignoring requests of elders to not play music during the early days of the station but taking the initiative to not air controversial content shows that Khorasan instinctively is aware of the boundaries it can push, and which for now need to remain in place if it is to continue to enjoy community support.

Focus Box: TV Consumption Patterns in Panjshir

Television ownership among the survey respondents was high: 82% of respondents owned a television set at home, and the vast majority (71%) watched TV every day. Contrast this to the percentage of respondents that listened to the radio everyday: 6%. In Panjshir, the relationship between television and radio consumption seemed to be more inverse than in other case study provinces. Part of the reason for this must be Panjshir’s access to electricity through water and solar systems, and its proximity to Kabul where it can buy relatively inexpensive television sets thus powered. *“We have water electricity stations that provide electricity from 4-9pm and many households have additional solar or water energy systems,”* says one elder.

A key challenge for Radio Khorasan in terms of sustainability, in addition to its finances, concerns media consumption patterns in Panjshir. On the basis of a community survey conducted in Bazarak with 100 randomly selected participants, 50 women, and 50 men, media consumption patterns in the area stood out from those conducted as part of the other case studies. The

majority of survey respondents did *not* have a radio at home (57%), a finding that stood out in comparison to the results of the same survey administered in other provinces in each of which at the majority of respondents invariably had a radio at home. A similarly large proportion (51%) of Panjshir respondents also never listened to the radio.

Of the 49% that did listen to the radio, however, almost all knew (92%) and listened (91%) to Radio Khorasan. In other words, people that do not listen to Radio Khorasan are people that do not listen to radio at all. This is because Radio Khorasan is the only local FM radio in Panjshir, a major push factor. Accordingly, of all those respondents that listened to the radio, almost all listed Khorasan as their favorite station to listen to. In part this is due to national radio such as BBC being broadcast on medium wave resulting in poor reception because of the valley’s mountainous topography. Radio Afghanistan, meanwhile, was considered by respondents to be biased towards the government. As a community elder also explains: *“Radio Khorasan is our local station and 98% of the people listen to it. Only a few listen to BBC and Azadi. This is because FM works well here whilst AM does not, and people are bored of the BBC and Azadi, they want something new.”* In addition, Radio Khorasan plays a unique role as a provider of local information and platform for local discussion: *“There is no other radio to compare to Radio Khorasan. BBC and Radio Azadi are nationwide but not local,”* says another community elder.

7.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY POSITIVES

- As the only local radio station within its coverage area, Khorasan fulfills a unique role facilitating access to local information and serving as a bridge between the community and local government that cannot be replicated by any other media presently accessible in Panjshir.
- It is able to perform this role well on account of a variety of programs that are highly interactive, responsive to community needs, and draw upon the expertise and authority of

local community members. Thus engaging community authorities also further cements community support for the station.

- Realizing support is a fragile good, staff exercises caution in regard to the (externally produced) content it broadcasts, acutely aware of controversial topics that might elicit community criticism. This bodes well for Khorasan's sustainability but might ultimately start to affect the station's ability to act as a driver of social change.
- Insecurity is not an issue in the Panjshir valley. As this is a factor that negatively impacts the operating scope of the most case study stations as well as the commercial environment in which they are active, the province's security contributes to its sustainability prospects.

7.2.2. SUSTAINABILITY NEGATIVES

- Radio Khorasan faces financial sustainability issues with revenues persistently falling short of costs. Whilst presently this shortfall is dealt with by withholding staff salaries, this solution is not sustainable long term if the station wishes to retain its employees. Khorasan would do well to more actively pursue business development opportunities, or in the absence of those, design a more structured volunteering program in order to absorb funding gaps.
- Media consumption patterns in Bazarak suggest that audiences are turning away from radio in favor of television, a feature prevalent in Panjshir because of its proximity to Kabul and access to alternative forms of energy.

8. RADIO KISHIM – BADAKHSHAN PROVINCE

- Founded in 2008, Radio Kishim broadcasts out of Kishim district in Badakhshan province.
- The station broadcasts 12 hours per day, from 6 to 11am, and from 2 to 9pm, covering 5 out of Badakhshan's 28 districts as well as Rostaq district in Takhar province.
- The station is able to meet 70% of its revenue needs through advertising, and is reliant upon donor funding for only 30% of its revenue needs.
- Radio Kishim is the only local radio station within its coverage area.

Figure 16: The entrance gate to Radio Kishim



Radio Kishim has broadcast from Kishim district since 2008 and has known no competition from other local media outlets. As the only local radio station in the region, it naturally attracts both an audience and advertisers. It is consequently able to raise 70% of its monthly income through advertising.

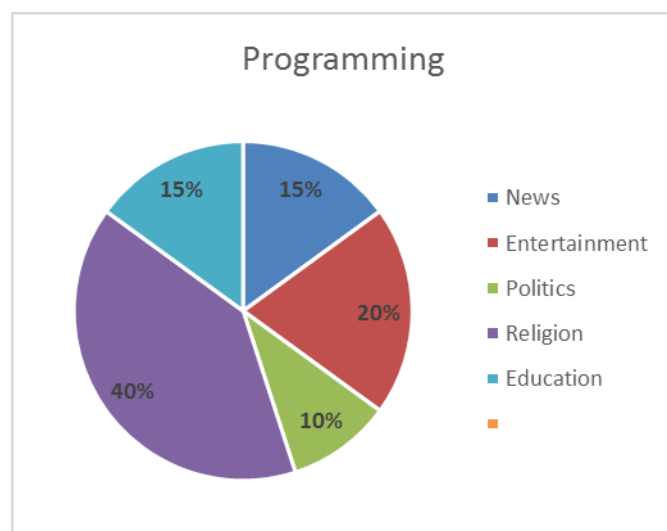
8.1. AUDIENCE: PROGRAMMING & ROLE

Radio Kishim broadcasts from 6 to 11am, and from 2 to 9pm – 12 hours of broadcast daily. According to station staff, 15% of content is news programming, 20% entertainment, 10% political programming, 40% religious programming, and 15% educational programming. Through this variety of content, Radio Kishim aims to have an impact in regard to increased access to information for its listeners as well as behavior towards women.

According to community elders, people in Kishim require information on security, the economy, the weather, educational opportunities, and local government activities. Radio Kishim is seen as struggling to meet these information needs. *“But it is not the fault of the radio, they are just not supported by the government and cannot meet the people’s needs with empty hands,”* says one community elder. Indeed, as a staff member also noted: *“our radio could meet all the information needs of the community but due to a lack of employees our role is reduced.”*

Radio Bayan and Voice of America both provide information via AM but the sound quality of Radio Kishim is better on FM, according to one staff member. In addition, although *“national or international*

radios do have better resources and more accurate information, we do not compete with AM stations because they focus on the national level, we would only compete with local stations which are not available here,” says the same staff member. Indeed, says another FGD participant: “it is the only station in the region that broadcasts local concerns... all programs are a 100% understandable because they broadcast in the local language, and even in the local accent so it is very easy to understand.”



Station staff as well as community members recognize Radio Kishim’s impact in regard to women’s rights and accountability. The station manager explains that “before it was very easy for people to bury a girl alive but now people are afraid of doing this because they know it will not remain secret, they will be held accountable for it by the radio.” And “the religious program *Sadaye Mombar* has changed ideas about underage girls getting married.” Such societal impact, however, remains limited “because the station is not broadcasting around the clock and they cannot cover everything that deserves coverage within the hours that they do broadcast. They can also be bolder in the roles they play, more daring. Now the only

topics their programs engage with is news, entertainment, and one religious program. The problem is a lack of budget, and consequently employees,” according to a community elder.

The audience is aware that the station faces problems such as lacking technical expertise and financial means, and that on account of that, it may be less professional than the national radios. But people manage their own expectations. As one community elder says: “the people believe that the radio is giving its maximum effort to bring positive change to society. As this is a local station, people do not have the same expectations as they would have from a national station: they are aware that the presenters are not very well educated or professional. But as people are aware of the challenges this station faces, they are willing to compromise and do not complain about it.”

The station broadcasts externally-produced programming from Salam Watandar, Equal Access, GIZ, and Karwan Sabz Agricultural Company, totaling 40% of all broadcasting. External programming has inspired the station to try its hand at new program formats. Given prevailing community mores, Radio Kishim edits some of the recorded external programs but “we have no control over Salam Watandar programs as they are aired in real-time,” says the station manager.

The station is well-known within the immediate community. In a survey of 75 randomly-selected households in and around Kishim, 85% were aware of the station and considered themselves to be regular listeners. Most listened to the radio in the evening (58%). Radio Kishim stood out as a station that was perceived to be qualitatively better by 72% of the respondents

The station’s staff believe their popularity is due to the fact that they pay close attention to their audience’s preferences, and change programs and timing accordingly. As the station manager commented: “this is very important for us because we are operating as a local radio, local radio means people’s radio so a people’s radio must consider people’s preferences. For example we received feedback from the people that they did not like one of our presenters because he was a member of a political party so we changed the presenter.”

8.2. SUSTAINABILITY

Revenues	Amount	Costs	Amount
Advertising	63,000	Salaries	25,000
Paid Programming	27,000	Electricity	8,000

Total	90,000	Maintenance	5,000
		Programs	10,000
		Other	10,000
		Total	58,000

Radio Kishim has a significant monthly surplus with revenues totaling 90,000 AFN and costs 58,000 AFN, leaving 32,000 AFN per month. Advertising income makes up 70% of total monthly revenues. Radio Kishim's biggest advertiser is telecom company Etisalat.

Advertising has increased in the last few years and the manager expects this trend to continue. The fact that more contracts are signed, however, does not mean that the station manages to benefit from each. The manager complained about three companies that have refused to pay the station upon completion of the contract's terms.

Focus Box: Advertising with Radio Kishim

A pharmaceutical company that has been advertising with Radio Kishim for two years relays that advertising prices are negotiable. *"This is not Kabul and the radio needs us, whereas in bigger cities advertisers run behind the media."* The company has a contract with Radio Kishim as it is the only local radio. *"This is the only radio available here, or I can say this is the only option we can chose, if there would be any other radio then I would first evaluate their coverage and then decide to give the advertisement to the radio with bigger coverage. But radio is the best option right now for advertisements in our district as it has the highest number of audience."*

Another health clinic that targets people that live in remote areas of Kishim specifically notes that a local radio station like Radio Kishim is particularly well positioned to reach these people. The center advertises through radio because *"our district is still in the 19th century and most of its people do not have access to other media like magazines and television."* According to the company representative, *"advertising is not an expense, it is an investment. The more you invest, the more benefit you get. Our income increased significantly since we are doing advertising... and now more people know our brand and accept it as a trusted source for health services."*

Costs total 58,000 AFN per month, of which 25,000 is paid to staff members as salary. Radio Kishim has 5 employees, and all are paid. All employees are men, and 4 out of 5 work part-time. Two have Bachelor's degrees, and a further two are students. Radio Kishim requires new staff members to be certified by the village head, ensuring radio hosts enjoy the support of the community. Staff members are paid between 3,000 AFN and 10,000 AFN per month but consider their salaries to be insufficient, a possibly threat to staff retention: *"I do not get a sufficient salary, it is less than 5,000 AFN per month. I am working here to learn, if this was not the case I would not work for his amount of salary,"* says one.

Focus Box: Women's Involvement at Radio Kishim

No women work at Radio Kishim despite the station actively seeking female employees. For a GIZ sponsored program on the rule of law, the station announced a job position for a female host at the significant sum of 10,000 AFN per month but was unable to hire anyone. Cultural attitudes are conservative, and religious scholars have complained about the station broadcasting music or women's voices. A mullah at a local mosque explained that *"we will criticize the radio until the end of our days."*

Female FGD participants unanimously lamented the lack of women's voices on the station. *"Women empowerment is what local radio does not play a role in... they are afraid of powerful people: male warlords and a lack of budget inhibits them from doing so as well as scholars because they are sensitive towards women and their role."* Not engaging with women's issues when there is a clear need for this type of information from the audience risks alienating female listeners.

Focus Box: Insecurity and Defeatism

Insecurity almost meant the end of Radio Kishim when in 2010 Taliban forces had surrounded the area in which the radio station is located and the station manager was alone in the studio for 6 days: *"this situation made me very hopeless for my radio."* The effects of present-day insecurity are felt acutely:

when Kunduz fell to the Taliban, the station manager started taking the receiver as well as other portable equipment such as headphones home with him every evening because he was unsure as to what would happen. Such high levels of insecurity keep the manager from investing in the radio. *“I could invest in a more powerful transmitter: broader coverage would be a big advantage for the station as Kishim borders Takhar, a more commercial province with a larger pool of advertisers. But why invest in a transmitter if it might fall in the hands of the Taliban?”*

Radio Kishim's enjoys community support on account of its involving respectful members of the community. Balancing involvement of community elders, however, appeared a delicate act as one elder explained that the local *shura* virtually controls Radio Kishim's content so as to ensure that the station does not broadcast anything that harmful to the local community.

Such a measure of control could stand in the way of the station's role as a driver of social progress. It should also be noted that the manager's response to these statements was that the elder was exaggerating.

8.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY POSITIVES

- Radio Kishim is led by a knowledgeable and well-organized and well-connected manager, involves community elders, and consequently enjoys community support.
- Through advertising revenues, Radio Kishim is able to cover its expenses, and advertisers, mainly in medical fields of business, have experienced an increase in their income following advertising. Because of its healthy financial accounts Kishim is also able to pay its staff members.
- As the only local radio station in its coverage area it enjoys a natural audience.

8.2.2. SUSTAINABILITY NEGATIVES

- The station falls short in terms of lacking women's involvement due to prevailing conservatism, and extensive community control.
- Kishim illustrates the disincentivizing effects of insecurity upon management decisions to develop and invest in the outlet.

9. RADIO DARMAN – JAWZJAN PROVINCE

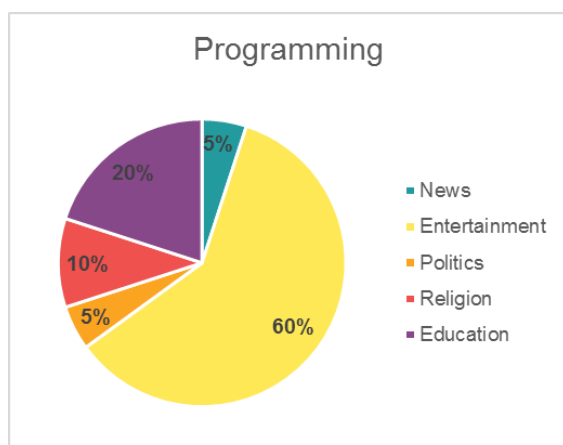
- Founded in 2009, Radio Darman broadcasts out of Aqcha district in Jawzjan province.
- The station broadcasts 24 hours per day, covering 5 out of Jawzjan’s 11 districts with its 500 Watt transmitter
- Darman is the only local radio station active within its broadcast area
- The station meets its revenue needs 50/50 through advertising and donor funding (including paid programming). It, nonetheless, suffers a monthly revenue deficit of 40,000 AFN.

Figure 17: The entrance gate to Radio Darman



Radio Darman has broadcast from Aqcha since 2009. For the last 8 years, it has been the only local media outlet within its coverage area. As such it has a monopoly position on local news: *“this is the only radio that can deliver local information about the area,”* according to male listeners. Radio Ariana, on FM, as well as the BBC, on AM, also broadcast in some of Radio Darman’s coverage area but they are not considered to be a competitors because Radio Ariana and BBC have a national focus. Thus says a staff member, *“our radio is more successful because we broadcast in local language and cover the problems of local people.”* This is the case despite the fact that on a professional level, Radio Darman, according to a community elder, *“cannot compare to the AM stations as it does not have the same resources... but it is doing its best.”*

Among the stations examined, Darman stands out for the high financial deficit it runs on a monthly basis as well as its community support and ability to broadcast 24 for hours per day.



9.1. AUDIENCE: PROGRAMMING & ROLE

Radio Darman has 24 hours of broadcast daily. According to management, this is divided into 60% entertainment, 20% educational programming, 5% news, 5% political programming, and 10% religious content.

One of Darman's most popular programs is *Sada-ye Mardom* (The People's Voice). It was mentioned by all FGD participants as their favorite program. The show connects listeners with government authorities, and seeks government accountability. Darman thus provides an interactive platform from which the public can make its voice heard by those in power. With this emphasis on interactive program formats that engage with community issues, Darman also invites teachers or educated members from society to convey their message to the community. For example, during *Noor Jawidan* (Lasting Light) a religious scholar provides information to people about their rights from an Islamic point of view. Interaction with the audience is pursued specifically to generate community support, and Radio Darman has "an open door for the community," says one community elder, "it is very easy to contact them. I am regularly in touch with them and share with them information about my village." 80% of programming is produced internally and 20% externally by Salam Watandar, and the BBC.

Radio Darman sees its role as fourfold: firstly, it aims to inform, secondly it aims to educate, after all "a radio is like a remote teacher to the people, going directly inside every home," says a community elder. Thirdly, Darman aims to raise public awareness of human rights, and finally it seeks to hold the provincial and district government accountable.

Radio Darman fulfills its role providing information, according to community elders, but within the limits of its capacities: "we hear about what is happening to our country very late because Darman does not have direct reports and copies news from other, national, media. I can say that the role of Darman in fulfilling people's need for information is weak. Yet Radio Darman with all its weaknesses is still a source of information. As most people are uneducated in the district it is a source that can teach them something." Male FGD participants were more charitable: "people's level of information has increased a lot and even the most uneducated members of society have some awareness about how to be a member of society and what is happening in the political world."

Radio Darman's role as a teacher raising awareness of human rights has been impactful. When Radio Darman started to recruit women and broadcast their voice, attitudes towards women within society changed, says one staff member. This is confirmed by a community elder: "now people agree that women are a main part of our society and have specific rights." In regard to facilitating public discourse and holding the government accountable, a community elder relayed how people come together to listen to *Sada-ye mardom*, and "try to contact the station to share their ideas with the rest of the community and authorities. This is a way for people to voice their problems. The program has enabled people to know their rights and has given them the courage to stand up for their rights and not let the government do whatever they want."

Darman was well known among the community. In an audience survey conducted with 76 randomly selected community members in Aqcha including 36 male and 40 female respondents, 77% of all respondents knew Radio Darman and were regular listeners. Evenings were the most popular time to listen to the station with 59% tuning in then. 97% of those that knew the station also though it was better than other radio stations accessible, notably the BBC and Radio Azadi.

9.2. SUSTAINABILITY

Radio Darman's financial sustainability prospects are bleak on account of a persistent monthly deficit of 40,000 AFN with total revenues of 50,000 AFN and costs of 90,000 AFN. Revenues stem in equal measure from advertising and paid programming. The latter includes Salam Watandar's monthly stipend of 14,000 AFN. The deficit is fueled by declining advertising revenues with insecurity, according to the station manager, having made potential advertisers more hesitant to invest. Darman's most important advertisers are all local businesses.

Revenue Source	Amount	Percentage
Advertising	25,000	50%
Paid programming	25,000	50%
Total	50,000	100%

Expenditure	Amount	Percentage
Salaries	30,000	34%
Electricity	10,000	11%
Maintenance	10,000	11%

Programs	20,000	22%
Rent	10,000	11%
Food	10,000	11%
Total	90,000	100%

In order to generate advertising revenues, personal networks are paramount. The owner and previous station manager of Radio Darman is a well-known figure within Aqcha with extensive networks across the commercial and public sectors but moved to Mazar-e Sharif in 2016 to lecture at the university and head up a local television outlet, leaving day-to-day management in the hands of his brother who has less media management experience. Consequently, staff members agree that Darman “*does not have strong management at the moment.*”

Focus Box: Advertising with Radio Darman

A pharmaceutical company headquartered in Aqcha has been advertising with Radio Darman since 2013 and has aired 3 advertisements. The most recent advertisement was aired 3 times per day for 2,000 AFN per month, a price negotiated down from the 3,000 AFN the company paid for its previous two advertisements. The lower price is a consequence of advertising being down as well as the impaired local economy leaving the company with a smaller advertising budget. Radio Darman was selected on account of its monopoly position as the only local radio station in Aqcha.

A total of 16 staff members work for Darman. 10 are volunteers, and 3 are women. Paid employees receive a salary between 1,000 and 3,000 AFN per month, and only two employees work full-time. Darman highlighted the challenges posted by reliance upon part-time volunteers and concomitant high staff turnover. That is, the acting station manager felt weary about investing in staff capacity through trainings, fearing skills could not be retained as volunteers find paid jobs outside of the station. Previous employees, having received training from Internews and Nai, left and found jobs with media outlets in Mazar-e Sharif. Few current employees have, accordingly, received any formal training outside of on-the-job training. Consequently, “*staff give their best but they are not professionals,*” according to male listeners. Limited staff capacity is a challenge that affects local radio across Afghanistan as well as the difficulty in balancing volunteering and community participation with certain standards of professionalism.

An additional challenge facing Darman is insecurity. When the Taliban attacked Aqcha district in 2014, the station could not broadcast for 10 days. In order to minimize the risks posed by insecurity, Radio Darman tries to develop good bonds with local elders. “*I am sure that the support of the local people is key to survive in a place like Aqcha,*” says the acting station manager. Insecurity can especially affect the presence of female staff in the station. One female staff member expressed her fear about working at the station.

Focus Box: Women’s Involvement at Radio Darman

Maliha is a relative of the acting station manager and works at Darman as a volunteer from 1-2pm and from 8-9pm every day. She received a journalism training from Nai a year ago which took a week and focused on reporting and presenting.

In general, women’s involvement was strong and the station experienced no troubles employing female staff and broadcasting women’s voices. Women’s involvement was high and female participants of the FGD also indicated they were keen to get involved in the radio station’s activities.

Focus Box: Community Support, Inclusivity, and Representation

Radio Darman enjoys great support in the community because it is “*a radio that tries to have something for everyone by broadcasting different programs in different languages,*” according to female FGD participants. As “*Aqcha is a district where different ethnic groups live,*” the station broadcasts in a range of languages, and the community “*believes that this radio can bring unity,*” according to male FGD participants. Conscious efforts to be inclusive and representative of the different communities in Aqcha by Darman are noted by the audience and serve as important pull-factors.

9.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY POSITIVES

- Radio Darman in many ways sets an example, broadcasting 24 hours per day, involving women, balancing donor and advertising revenues as well as internally and externally produced programming.
- It, in addition, enjoys the support of the community on account of its interaction with its audience, inclusive and representative programming, and role as watchdog. It has also effected social change and fulfills its role as local information provider to the best of its abilities.

9.2.2. SUSTAINABILITY NEGATIVES

- Management, however, is currently not maximizing this solid basis, and displayed a defeatist rather than ambitious attitude in the face of insecurity and the economic downturn.
- Reliance upon volunteers leads to high staff turnover, which in turn has made management hesitant about investing in trainings. Staff capacities, accordingly, are limited. Staff should be made to feel invested in the station and management could consider helping part-time volunteers find part-time paid jobs that would allow them to continue work at the station whilst generating some income.
- Darman's financial deficit of 40,000 AFN per month is cause for concern in regard to the station's financial sustainability. More could be done by management in the field of business development and marketing to bolster advertising revenues.

10. RADIO ALINA – NURISTAN PROVINCE

- Founded in 2011, Radio Alina broadcasts from Nurgaram district in Nuristan province.
- The station broadcasts 10 hours per day, from 5 to 10am, and from 5 to 10pm, covering 3 out of Nuristan's 8 districts with its 300 Watt transmitter.
- Alina is the only local radio station accessible within its broadcast area.
- The station is predominantly reliant upon donor funding (70%) to meet its revenue needs. The remaining 30% is generated through advertising contracts.

Figure 18: Radio Alina, Nuristan

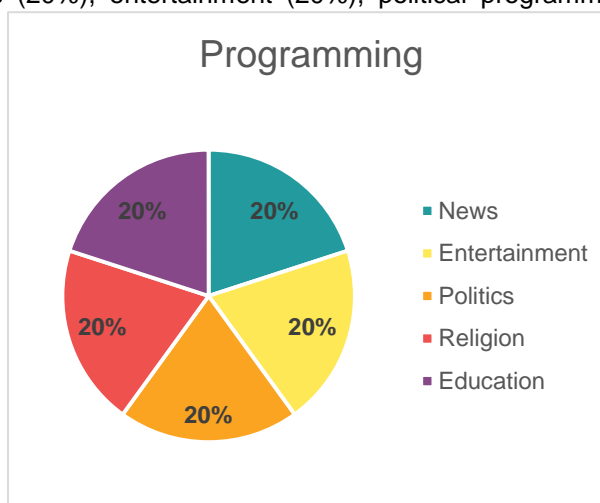


Radio Alina has broadcast from Nurgaram since 2011. Alina is the only local radio station in Nuristan, an important push factor. The station, in addition, provides the community with access to local, national, and international news. The latter are also broadcast in Nuristan by the BBC, Radio Azadi, Voice of America, and Radio Afghanistan. Whilst “*Radio Afghanistan is weak, Radio Alina cannot compete with international stations because of their superior professionalism and equipment,*” says the station manager. Radio Alina, however, provides the community with a forum for discussion through roundtables, something national radio stations are unable to do. Television and internet penetration in Nuristan is low according to the station manager, and, accordingly, does not affect Radio Alina’s listenership.

10.1. AUDIENCE: ROLE & PROGRAMMING

Radio Alina broadcasts 10 hours per day, from 5 to 10am and from 5 to 10pm. According to station staff this is divided roughly equally into news (20%), entertainment (20%), political programming (20%), religious programming (20%), and educational programming (20%).

Programming covers a range of topics including agriculture, health, and politics, and draws on the authority and expertise of respected community members. One roundtable program, for example, hosts staff from the Directorate for Agriculture who answer questions from listeners whilst in another scholars of Islam discuss community issues identified by the station manager and offer advice.



Interactive, educational, and tailored program formats are typical for Radio Alina. A knowledge quiz program, for example, encourages listeners to call into the studio, and awards right answers with pens and books donated by the provincial Education Directorate. Informal surveys are conducted regularly to decide on topics relevant to the audience. By working closely with government directorates such as those of Education and Agriculture, Radio Alina, furthermore, is able to raise the voice of the people to the relevant authorities, and transfer the latter's voice back to the communities, thus benefitting both parties.

Many of Radio Alina's programs are geared towards problem-solving and behavioral change. *Kali and Kaliwali* (Village and Villager), for example, presents the findings of a staff member's excursion into a single village in Nuristan where he gathers information on the issues that farmers are facing, and the subsequent presentation of this information to the Directorate for Agriculture as well as possible solutions to these issues. During *Staso Roghteya* (Your Health) doctors are invited to the studio to discuss a certain health topic. "Recently, they discussed vaccination because I [the station manager] had heard that some parents were not vaccinating their children because they feared it could alter their brain. That is why I urgently invited doctors to talk about this. They explained that vaccines have nothing to do with misbehavior from children," says the station manager.

Tailoring the content of broadcasts specifically to the issues that local communities are facing allows Radio Alina to air highly relevant information. "Seeing what peoples demands are and what they want in programs," says the station manager, "is a key way of ensuring programs are tailored and relevant, two preconditions for them having an impact." Such a high level of responsiveness to audience needs and preferences marks Radio Alina, and the station takes audience feedback very seriously. For example, in *Da Mirmano Hoquq* (Women Rights) "we previously selected a topic related to women's lives and rights for a religious scholar to discuss. Then community members advised us to first ask women what kind of information they need. So this is what we do now." By listening to the community, and outlining their information needs first, Radio Alina is able to offer tailored content whilst giving its audience a sense of influence.

Radio Alina's impact upon the community flows directly from its programming decisions and attention to community needs. The same *Da Mirmano Hoquq*, according to the station manager, has led to "more people nowadays sending their daughters to school, and some people giving their daughters inherited land."

10.2. SUSTAINABILITY

Revenue Source	Amount	Percentage
Advertisement	12,000 AFN	30%
Salam Watandar	28,000 AFN	70%
Total Revenues	40,000 AFN	100%

Radio Alina's monthly revenues of 40,000 AFN cover monthly costs of 35,000 AFN. Revenues are made up for 70% of Salam Watandar's stipend. In regard to generating advertising revenues, Nuristan's rural population poses a setback as most communities farm for self-sustenance so that surplus for trade is limited. The station manager tries to draw businesses in by offering low initial rates

and then gradually increasing airtime prices, and uses Facebook and in-person visits in addition to announcements on the radio to catch advertisers' attention. Because Nuristan is underserved by donor organizations due to the province's poor accessibility and high levels of insecurity Alina faces fewer collaborative or paid programming opportunities.

Powering the station or generator fuel costs for electricity, at 25,000 AFN per month, eat up almost the entire Salam Watandar monthly stipend of 28,000, highlighting the significant financial burden that lacking energy poses to stations.

Expenditure	Amount	Percentage
Electricity	25,000 AFN	71%
Maintenance	3,000 AFN	9%
Other	7,000 AFN	20%
Total Costs	35,000 AFN	100%

In order to balance this cost, all station staff members work as part-time volunteers. In order to ensure staff members are still able to generate a livelihood, the station manager in return for their work finds each staff member a paid part-time job in other sectors. This creative solution draws on the professional networks of the manager, and attests to the station's ability to work with volunteers whilst ensuring a measure of employee retention as well as Alina's contribution to the community's human resource capacity building. In total, Radio Alina employs 7 part-time staff members, having grown the team from only 2 in 2011. Whilst human resource procedures overall were similar to those of other stations, Radio Alina stood out because it also checked with the local government whether a potential employee has a criminal record.

Finding qualified staff, in addition, was deemed difficult not because the station was unable to offer a competitive salary, as was the case for most other stations, but *"because people do not want to put themselves at risk."* This response highlights the possible ramifications of insecurity for journalists in the region. Radio Alina once almost closed its doors due to insecurity, *"when there was heavy fighting between the government and Taliban. We wanted to close the station because we were unable to broadcast but the community members held a meeting demanding from the Taliban that they do not allow anyone to burn the radio station."* Strong community ties clearly provide an invaluable measure of protection in volatile security situations.

The community not only serves as a buffer against insecurity but also curtails the station's editorial liberties. The station manager relays: *"I wanted to create a program about working women and hired two female presenters to host the show. This led to criticisms from the community and eventually, the two intimidated women left although we did not stop the program."* Radio Alina's lack of women's involvement is not uncommon and poses a challenge that needs to be overcome by other sample stations also if they are to be truly representative of the members of their audience.

10.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY POSITIVES

- Radio Alina is the only local radio station in Nuristan, an important push factor. Highly relevant programs made in local dialects based on the audience's preferences, and in line with local culture further pull listeners in. Such tailored programming brings about community support and allows the station to play a unique role within Nuristan that cannot be replicated presently by other media.
- The station is financially healthy with revenues surpassing expenses but relies much (for example 70%) on Salam Watandar's stipend. Further diversification of funding sources would benefit Alina's financial sustainability prospects.
- Alina manages to mitigate sustainability risks associated with reliance upon volunteers in an innovative way by providing part-time volunteers with paid part-time jobs also.
- Alina successfully draws upon community support to mitigate security risks.

10.2.2. SUSTAINABILITY NEGATIVES

- Potential to generate advertising revenues is limited with minimal commercial activity in Nuristan. In addition, reliance upon generators for electricity entails a significant monthly cost-post.
- Radio Alina's women's involvement is low due to prevailing conservatism in the region.

11. RADIO MILMA – PAKTIKA PROVINCE

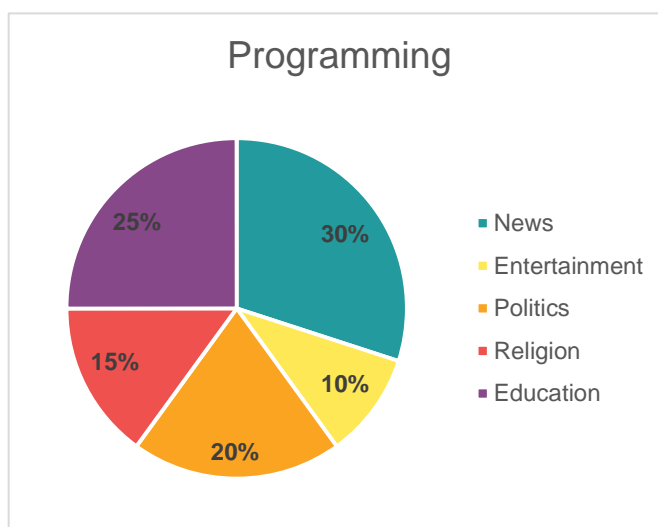
- Founded in 2011, Radio Milma is among the youngest of the case study stations, and broadcasts out of the Sharana (Central) district of Paktika province.
- The station broadcasts 14.5 hours per day, from 6am to 12pm, and from 2pm to 10:30pm. Milma covers all of Paktika 19 districts, using 3 transmitters (2 x 1000 watt, 1 x 300 watt)
- Milma is active in a reasonably competitive media landscape, with 3 other local radio stations broadcasting within its coverage area.
- The station meets its revenue needs 50% through advertising and 50% through donor funding including paid programming.

Radio Milma started broadcasting in 2011 from Paktika’s Urgun district. In the years that followed, the station established outlets in Kairkot and Sharana districts also. With three outlets, and 3 transmitters, its coverage area today is extensive and includes the whole of Paktika as well as parts of neighboring Ghazni and Wardak provinces. With such a coverage area, it is able to broadcast to an extensive audience, and, consequently, to draw in advertisers. 50% of its 253,000 AFN monthly income, the highest among the case study stations, is generated through advertising.

Along with Radio Sol-e Paigham, Radio Milma stands out among the case study stations as well positioned within the current media and advertising climate on account of its extensive coverage area, the advertisers it is thus able to engage, and the professional staff it hires with income thus generated. All of Milma’s staff are paid and some are professional journalists.

11.1. AUDIENCE: PROGRAMMING & ROLE

Milma broadcasts from 6am to 12pm and from 2pm to 10:30pm – 14.5 hours of broadcast daily. According to station staff, this is divided roughly into 10% entertainment, 50% news and politics, 15% religious programs, and 25% educational programming. Programs cover topics such as new technologies in *Lalona Pa Erow Key* (Ruby), and community problems in *Garde Meiz* (Roundtable). A daily religious program broadcast for an hour in the early morning, and 2 hours in the afternoon discusses women rights in Islam. News, local and national, is broadcast on the *Khabaree Service* (News Service). The station broadcasts externally-produced programming from both Salam Watandar and AMCO that makes up 25% of all broadcasting. The benefits of external programming are clearly perceived by the station manager: *“external programs dedicate programs to important topics and present these to the people in a way that is innovative and useful. For example, people listen to programs on agriculture because they relay information about new systems and techniques for farmers. Many people have called the station to say how much they have learned from these programs.”*



Milma was well known in its immediate environment. In an audience survey conducted among 70 households randomly selected, including 44 male and 26 female respondents, 69% knew Milma and considered themselves to be regular listeners. Almost half preferred to listen in the morning (48%) and 35% preferred the afternoon.

In addition to the BBC, Radio Azadi, and Radio Afghanistan, 3 other local radio stations are active in Radio Milma’s broadcast area: Pashtun Ghag, Radio Lima, and Radio Talwassa. Radio Milma, however, is strongest at the regional level with outlets in three districts and plans to open others in Kabul and Ghazni, according to one staff member. Specifically, Radio Milma is valued for its respect

of local traditions, local news broadcasts, attention to audience's preferences, the professionalism of its staff and quality of its programs, and reliability, according to focus group discussions.

11.2. SUSTAINABILITY

Revenue Source	Amount	Percentage
Core funding	28,000	10%
Advertising	100,000	40%
Donor funding/Paid programming	75,000	30%
Other	50,000	20%
Total	253,000	100%

Monthly revenues of 253,000 were the highest among the sample stations, and have increased slightly in comparison to previous years. Almost half (100,000 AFN) of all income is generated through advertising. With three outlets, the station's coverage is extensive and having a large audience draws in advertisers. The station charges 250 AFN per day and airs an advertisement 5 times for 1 minute in exchange. Its top advertisers include AMCO, a local clinic, and the provincial Education Directorate.

Cost	Amount	Percentage
Salaries	100,000	50%
Electricity	25,000	11%
Maintenance	8,000	4%
Programs	10,000	5%
Other	60,000	30%
Total	203,000	100%

Radio Milma's staff stood out on account of its professionalism. With healthy financial accounts, the station is able to pay all 10 employees around 10,000 AFN per month, and almost all worked full-time. One employee had worked previously with television and had a university degree in journalism. Having full-time, paid staff facilitates a level of professionalism that further draws in both audience and advertisers, and thus pays dividends in kind. The station has grown its staff from 6 in Urgun district to 15 across Paktika province. The station does its best to increase the human resource capacity of the community in the media sector. Says the station manager, "we have a volunteering and internship program, we have trained six people now who have found jobs in other radio stations. We want to attract more young people to the internship, train them, and share our experience with them so that they can find jobs for themselves in the future."

No women work at the station on account of prevailing conservatism in Paktika. "We cannot directly broadcast women's voices in live programs, because our community is not used to this. Initially we could not published women's voices in recorded programs either but after a long struggle now we can. We had one women's program but we had to pull it off air as the community was not happy and the radio station does not want to sour its relationship with the community."

This lack of female representation in the station's staff and programs is part of the reason that the station manager wants to expand to Kabul and Ghazni as programs hosted by women that are produced there can be aired in Paktika. Radio Azadi, for example, already has women's programs and communities in Paktika listen to them, and are more tolerant of them because they are not locally produced.

Focus Box: Advertising with Radio Milma

The representative of a local medical clinic believes that "if you want to earn, first you need to spend." He had heard about advertising with Radio Milma through the advertisement the station broadcasts for itself. The representative took down the station's number, and arranged a meeting with the manager who referred him to the advertising officer. The clinic lauds the station for its level of professionalism and trustworthiness: once the station missed an advertisement and immediately let the clinic know and reimbursed the cost.

Although the clinic tried to negotiate on pricing (250 AFN per day – 7500 per month) Radio Milma stuck to its fixed rate, unusual among case study stations. And "although 250 is more expensive, the quality of the advertisement and the coverage of the radio is good. People trust the station. We also advertised in other media but did not see any changes. When we started advertising with Radio Milma we noticed a big change and received many phone calls from people asking about the location of the clinic. Calls came from districts all over Paktika."

Focus Box: Leadership and Expansion

The station manager of Radio Milma is ambitious and wants to open additional outlets in Ghazni and Kabul also. *“We want to have a greater broadcast area so that in the future we will have more advertisements and our income will increase.”* The manager also makes use of social media extensively. Radio Milma is the only sample station that streams its programs through its websites also, drawing in Afghan listeners in Saudi Arabia, India, and Pakistan. It was the only case study station to do.

11.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY POSITIVES

- Radio Milma’s sustainability prospects are strong on account of a mutually reinforcing dynamic whereby the station’s large broadcasts area covers a relatively large audience across three provinces which, in turn, draws in advertisers and revenues. The revenues allow the station to invest in additional transmitters to further increase its coverage – with plans to open outlets in Ghazni and Kabul also – as well as professional staff. Capable employees produce quality programming that allows the station to thrive among its 3 local radio competitors. This marks Radio Milma as one of the most professionally organized radio stations encountered.
- This is due in part to the vision and ambition of the station manager who drives business development, innovation, and coverage expansion. Radio Milma attests to the importance of individual leadership in the success of a local radio station. Whilst this bodes well for Milma’s future sustainability, such reliance carries with it the risk that if the individual manager ceases to be involved, success starts to unravel. Due attention should be paid to putting in place systems that allow Milma to continue to thrive also in the absence of its charismatic leader.
- By streaming its content also through the station’s website, Radio Milma is even better positioned to reach an audience beyond the spheres of its physical coverage area, and can take advantage of future improvements in internet connectivity in Afghanistan.
- Milma pays attention to marketing with a dedicated advertisement officer dealing with advertisement contracts. Milma does not negotiate on advertising prices and its value is recognized by advertisers, this bodes well for further generation of advertising revenues.

11.2.2. SUSTAINABILITY NEGATIVES

- A lack of women’s involvement due to prevailing conservatism remains a sustainability negative that risks alienating female audiences and impacts the ability of stations to drive change in regard to social relationships and gender equality.

LOCAL RADIO IN AFGHANISTAN

A SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

ANNEX B: METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH COMPONENTS

The research consisted of three main components that, taken together, combine in-depth qualitative research with quantitative data, and findings from the most recent media publications.

1. CASE STUDIES OF TEN STATIONS

Ten provincial community radio stations in media-scarce environments that were originally established by Internews and are presently Salam Watandar partners were the focus of an in-depth case study (see the below table).¹³⁸

Figure 19: Map of Afghanistan with case study provinces highlighted



Three main considerations informed the selection of the case study stations: firstly, the rural or urban setting of the station, secondly, the station's geographical location within Afghanistan, and finally, the presence of female management and staff. Care was exercised to select stations in remote and media-scarce environments in order to assess their sustainability within a context wherein the station is one of the few formal channels of information. In addition, the selected stations are distributed across the whole of Afghanistan, allowing for analysis of radio services within a variety of demographic and geographical contexts. Finally, in order to assess the involvement of women in community radio, stations with a significant female presence were prioritized (see the below table).

¹³⁸ Note that all stations under examination have been established by Internews and are part of the Salam Watandar network as distinguished from the totality of Salam Watandar's network partners, over half of which has not been established by Internews.

Table 8: List of Internews – Salam Watandar Partner Stations (case study stations highlighted in lilac, female-led stations in italics)

#	Station Names	Province	Region	Capital/Provincial/District
1	Radio Amo	Badakhshan	North East	Provincial Center
2	Radio Kishim	Badakhshan	North East	District Center
3	Radio Jurm	Badakhshan	North East	District Center
4	Radio Baharak	Badakhshan	North East	District Center
5	Radio Farhat	Baghlan	East Central	Provincial Center
6	Radio Tiraj Mir	Baghlan	East Central	Provincial Center
7	<i>Radio Rabia Balkhi</i>	<i>Balkh</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>Provincial Center</i>
8	Radio Naw-e Bahar	Balkh	North	Provincial Center
9	Radio Bamyan	Bamyan	Central	Provincial Center
10	Radio Daikundi	Daikundi	Central	Provincial Center
11	Radio Ghaznawyan	Ghazni	East Central	Provincial Center
12	<i>Radio Jaghuri</i>	<i>Ghazni</i>	<i>East Central</i>	<i>District Center</i>
13	Radio Ertibat	Ghazni	East Central	District Center
14	Radio Sada-ye Hadalat	Ghor	Central	Provincial Center
15	Radio Sabawoon	Helmand	Souh	Provincial Center
16	Radio Nedaye Subh	Herat	West Central	District Center
17	Radio Saday Jawan	Herat	West Central	Provincial Center
18	Radio Darman	Jawzjan	North West	District Center
19	Radio Qarabagh	Kabul	East Central	District Center
20	Radio Sulh-e Paigham	Khost	East Central	Provincial Center
21	<i>Radio Zohra</i>	<i>Kunduz</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>Provincial Center</i>
22	Radio Jaihoon	Kunduz	North	District Center
23	Radio Kawoon	Laghman	East Central	Provincial Center
24	Radio Millie Paygham	Logar	East Central	District Center
25	Radio Milma	Paktika	South East	Provincial Center
26	Radio Khorasan	Panshir	Central	Provincial Center
27	Radio Dehrawood	Uruzgan	South East	District Center
28	Radio Alina	Nooristan	East Central	District Center
29	Radio Takharistan	Takhar	North	Provincial Center
30	Radio Yawali Ghag	Wardak	East Central	District Center

The case studies will form the backbone of the study, relaying an in-depth look at the history of the station, its present-day activities, the relationships between the radio station and the community, the

role played by the station within and its impact upon the community, and the challenges and opportunities facing the station's sustainability.

CASE STUDY COMPONENTS

Case studies were led by Altai Consulting's national consultants, and, on average, consisted of a week of research activities in and around the station and communities within its coverage area. Each case study comprised of seven components.¹³⁹

1. 1 KII WITH THE STATION MANAGER

The key-informant interview conducted with the station manager covered all topics of the research and was followed up at the end of the case study period with a second, informal and rapid interview to clarify any points that were raised over the course of the week's research activities.

2. 2 KIIS WITH STAFF MEMBERS OF THE STATION

Two key-informant interviews with staff members of the station were conducted to assess their personal capacities, and to understand their perception of the station and its prospects for sustainability as well as their perception of the community, its need for local information and news coverage and the station's ability to meet it. Where possible, a female staff member was interviewed.

3. 2 KIIS WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY LEADERS

Two key-informant interviews with local community leaders explored media usage within the community, and the ways in which it has changed in the recent past. In addition, attention was paid to the community's awareness, usage, and perception of the radio station, the latter's role and within the community, and manners in which this impact could be amplified.

4. 2 KIIS WITH LOCAL ADVERTISERS

Two key-informant interviews with local advertisers gathered qualitative data about local advertising practices and potential and shed light on the radio station's business development activities, its professionalism, and its financial sustainability.

5. 2 FGDs WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO LISTEN TO THE RADIO STATION

Two focus group discussions were conducted with community members that listen to the station, one with male listeners, the other with female listeners. These FGDs collected qualitative data about the preferences and behaviors of the station's listenership, the quality of the station's broadcasts and its broadcast schedules, general awareness, usage, and perception of the station as well as the role and impact of the station on the community, and the ways in which this impact can be amplified. Participants were recruited from the audience survey (see below) respondents as well as the personal networks of the radio station's management and staff.

6. 2 FGDs WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO DO NOT LISTEN TO THE RADIO STATION

Two focus group discussions were conducted with community members that listen to the station, one with male listeners, the other with female listeners. The discussions explored why media-users do not listen to the target station, and what could make them listen to it. Participants were recruited from the audience survey (see below) respondents.

7. AN AUDIENCE SURVEY AMONG COMMUNITY MEMBERS

A mostly close-ended audience survey was administered by two enumerators, one male, the other female, from Altai Consulting's network within the station's coverage area, targeting men and women equally, and using the random walk method. The survey questions focused on radio consumption, access to media, and awareness, usage, and perceptions of the target station. The survey, thus, gathered brief audience data for the locations under analysis, some of which had not been covered by previously administered nationwide audience surveys.

¹³⁹ Two exceptions exist: no FGDs were conducted in Kunduz because of the security situation during the research period and only a station manager interview was conducted for Radio Alina because of issues of accessibility into Nuristan.

The enumerators aimed to survey 50 men and 50 women with each station's coverage area. Limitations in terms of time as well as the unwillingness of community members in certain provinces to participate in the survey meant that this goal was not always reached. As the sample was not intended to be representational, however, this should not discredit the gathered data.¹⁴⁰

Table 9: Interviews and FGDs conducted

	Panjshir	Paktika	Khost	Kunduz	Jawzjan	Badakhshan	Nuristan	Ghor	Daikundi	Ghazni
Total	Center	Center	Center	Center	Aqcha	Kishim	Nurgram	Center	Center	Jaghuri
10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
62	5	7	7	7	7	7	1	7	7	7
32	4	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	4
808	100	70	102	96	76	75	14	87	96	92

TOOLS

For each of these components, a separate tool was designed on the basis of a brief review of the ten case study radio stations, the research team's updated understanding of the media landscape in Afghanistan, particular in regard to radio services, based on secondary research, informal interviews with media stakeholders as well as Altai Consulting's decade-long experience designing research tools for media assessments in Afghanistan.

Research Tools	
1.	KII Station Manager
2.	KII Station Staff Member
3.	KII Community Leader
4.	KII Advertiser
5.	FGD Guidelines Station Listeners
6.	FGD Guidelines Station Non-Listeners
7.	Audience Survey

For the case studies, a total of 10 KIIs with station managers have taken place, 18 KIIs with station staff members, 18 KIIs with community elders, and 16 KIIs with advertisers. 36 FGDs were conducted with 5-6 participants each, 18 with men, and 18 with women. One half engaged listeners of the local radio station, the other half non-listeners. 808 community members participated in an audience survey.

¹⁴⁰ Administration of the survey tool will testify to the importance of audience knowledge in regard to the sustainability of independent, local media. The survey has been developed in such a way that a small, rural station can administer it with limited resources. The survey, thus, will not only inform the study but also the station manager, showing how easy, replicable, and informative the tool can be. The survey methodology and results will be shared with the station managers.

The findings that transpired on account of administration of these tools culminated in ten stand-alone case studies that are included in this report. Each case study has also been shared with the respective station manager to facilitate knowledge sharing.

2. PHONE INTERVIEWS WITH 20 RADIO STATIONS

The remaining 20 Salam Watandar partner radio stations that were established by Internews were assessed through a key-informant interview with the station manager via phone. The aggregated results of these interviews are included in the synthesis part of this report.

Table 10: Station Phone Interviews

Num	Station Names	Province	Frequencies
1	Radio Bamyān	Bamyān	88
2	Radio Sulh-e Paigham	Khost	88,8
3	Radio Dehrawood	Uruzgan	87,5
4	Radio Sor ghar	Zabul	89,5
5	Radio Baharak/Baharistan	Badakhshan	89,7
6	Radio Farhat	Baghlan	90,7
7	Radio Tiraj Mir	Baghlan	89,4
8	Radio Ghaznawyan	Ghazni	89,3
9	Radio Ertibat	Ghazni	88,3
10	Radio Nedaye Subh	Herat	90,4
11	Radio Jaihoon	Kunduz	88
12	Radio Millie Paygham	Logar	94
13	Radio Yawali ghag	Wardak	94,4
14	Radio Qarabagh	Kabul	94,7
15	Radio Naw-e Bahar	Balkh	89,9
16	Radio Kawoon	Laghman	89,4
17	Radio Takharistan	Takhar	87,5
18	Radio Saday Jawan	Herat	92,3
19	Radio Rabia Balkhi	Balkh	87,9
20	Radio Jurm	Badakhshan	87,9

3. INFORMAL INTERVIEWS & SECONDARY RESEARCH

The final research module comprised informal interviews with media stakeholders, including Internews and Salam Watandar staff, in Kabul. These interviews shed light on the history of Internews and Salam Watandar's activities in Afghanistan and their present work as well as developments within the media and advertising sector in the country and the general economy. The below table details the interviews that have taken place in this regard.

Name	Organization	Date
Shannon York	Internews	Sept. 2016
Nasir Maimanagy	Salam Watandar	Sept. 2016
Yoseph Kadrie	Salam Watandar	Sept. 2016
Said Ahmad Farid Ghazanfari	Internews	Sept. 2016
Abdullah Rahmani	Radio Sada-e-Dost, Nimroz	Aug. 2016
Engineer Zamir	Salam Watandar	Oct. 2016
Najib Yourish	Salam Watandar	Oct. 2016
Siddiqa Sherzai	Radio Roshani, Kunduz	Oct. 2016
Abdul Hameed	Lapis Communications	Oct. 2016

In addition, the module included a review of the major publications on Afghanistan's media landscape. The consulted publications are listed in the bibliography.

In addition, media-related development programs, their strategies, objectives, outputs, and impacts, have been reviewed, including the Afghanistan Media Development and Empowerment Program (AMDEP: 2010-2013) sponsored by USAID, the Afghanistan Capacity for Media and Elections (ACME) funded by AusAID and implemented by Internews, and the Afghan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP: 2013-2018).

Finally, the legal and regulatory framework has been scrutinized, including the Constitution of Afghanistan on the issue of Freedom of Speech (Article 34), the 2014 Access to Information Law, and the in 2016 amended Mass Media Law.

The findings from this research component complement and contextualize the case study and phone interview results in the synthesis section of the final report.

LIMITATIONS

The following limitations of the methodology transpired during the research:

1. SELF-REPORTING BIAS

The case studies rely for a large part on the evaluations of the radio station manager. At times, it was suspected that he or she may have vested interests in, on the one hand, reporting on the success of his or her radio station, or, on the other hand, pressing for continued technical and financial assistance.

- Measurement taken: the research team conducted KIs with informants other than the station manager, including community members, advertisers, and station staff members as well as FGDs with both listeners and non-listeners in order to capture as comprehensive a picture as is possible of the role, impact, and sustainability of the radio station. Interviewing a range of actors allowed for triangulation of the data, thus enhancing its reliability.

2. DIFFICULTIES REACHING LISTENERSHIP

The audience survey was administered to a random sample of community members within the station's coverage area, but it should be noted that this sample is not representative of the entire coverage area as some very remote communities were bypassed due to the low level of information available on populations within certain areas as well as time and resource constraints. As a consequence, the audience survey findings will highlight certain views of the majority of community members within the coverage area but will not capture the views and opinions of what anecdotally are likely to be demographically very distinct communities.

In addition, in certain conservative districts and provinces, notably Paktika, the research team encountered severe difficulties finding participants for both the audience survey and the FGDs. As a consequence, the total number of audience surveys administered is significantly lower for this case study than others. In addition, the personal networks of station management and staff had to be relied upon relatively heavily in order to recruit FGD participants. The possibility, accordingly, exists that these participants were favorable towards the radio station.

3. SECURITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Because of the precarious security situation in Kunduz over the course of the research period, the research team was unable to conduct any FGDs in the city in regard to Radio Zohra. Only the KIs (7 in total were conducted). Because of issues of accessibility and security, furthermore, in the case of Radio Alina in Nuristan, only a KI with the station manager could take place and was conducted in neighboring Laghman province. The case studies for both Radio Zohra and Radio Alina, accordingly, are not as comprehensive as the other case studies.

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